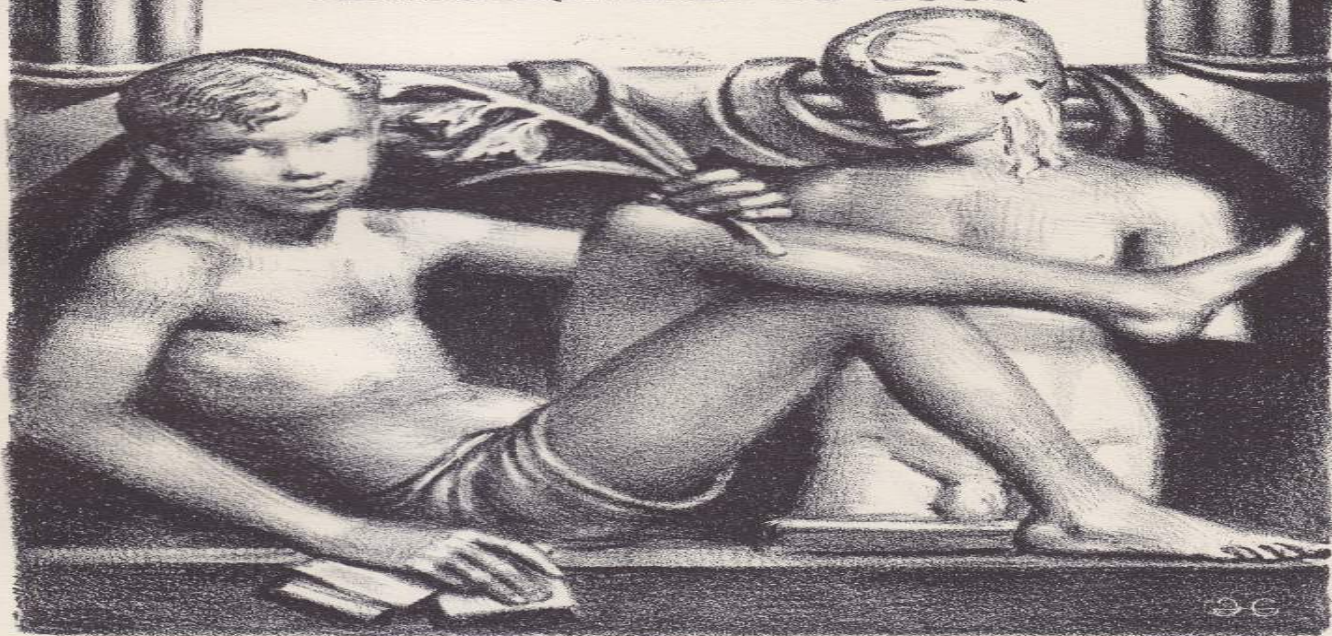


ROGER PEYREFITTE  
LES  
**AMITIÉS**  
PARTICULIÈRES  
LITHOGRAPHIES DE GOOR



# SPECIAL FRIENDSHIPS

*A Novel by  
Roger Peyrefitte*

*Translated from the French by  
Edward Hyams*

*Flammarion, Paris 1953*



***Roger PEYREFITTE***

***Les amitiés particulières***

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# PART 1





This was Georges' first good-bye and he was no longer sure of going through it creditably. His heart contracting, he leant against the door of the car which was to bear his parents from him. He could feel tears coming. His father said, "Come, now; you're fourteen. A man. There was a schoolboy—not as old as you—Bonaparte, and when a schoolmaster at Brienne asked him who the deuce he thought he was, that's what he said: a man!"

Much Georges cared whether Bonaparte, as a schoolboy, took himself for a man! Watching the car vanish round a bend in the road, it seemed to him that he had been abandoned and left alone in the world. But at that moment he heard the shouts of his new schoolfellows and, as if by magic, his distress evaporated. Was he to appear a milksop to these spirited boys? He cared little for being a man, but a great deal for being a boy.

He went back into the school with the nun who was acting as his chaperone. There was bustle everywhere, and it took his mind off his troubles. Once again, on the first floor, he saw the photographs of groups of pupils which decorated the walls of the corridor. But why on earth was the good Sister taking him to the infirmary? Ah, she was taking him to her own room. On the door, as she opened it, he again read the notice which had amused his parents:

“THE INFIRMARY SISTER IS:

IN            IN CHAPEL  
OUT        IN THE LINEN-ROOM  
BUSY      IN THE KITCHEN.”

The pointer indicated “OUT”.

“Get over your first feelings,” the Sister said, “and wait for me in this room. I am going to unpack and put your outfit away myself. So, you see, I set the pointer to LINEN-ROOM.”

Georges smiled at the idea of her talking to him as if he were a child. If she were taking my photograph, he thought, she would certainly be telling me to watch for the dicky-bird! But all this had quite restored his self-confidence: he was himself again.

With his elbows on the sill of the open window, he looked down into the inner courtyard. On the left were the doors to the assembly room and the study-room, with the class-rooms behind them and the dormitories above. On the right, the junior school. Facing him, the two doors of the chapel surmounted by a cross decorated with festoons. Under an open penthouse, the great bell, its rope swinging. Below the infirmary was the refectory which opened on to the main staircase leading to the Superior’s quarters.

This courtyard was, no doubt, intended to resemble a garden, with trees, walks, a freshly mown lawn, a rock-and-shell basin with a statue of the child Jesus. The most notable trees were lilacs and cypresses; the flowers were meagre-looking dahlias and marguerites. The box hedges had been trimmed all out of shape by some abbe on holiday. The jets of the

fountains surrounding the statue were thin trickles; the Fathers were economising the water. Georges thought of the great garden of his own house, with its fountain, its statue of the god Terminus, the rock gardens, flower-beds, and the big hot-house at the bottom of the garden, full of sweet scents. This college garden overlooked by the study-rooms was like Lancelot's garden of "Greek roots": it left "vain colours" to others, for it was designed only to foster wisdom in young souls.

Souls: it was, indeed, for the good of his soul that Georges was here. His father had wanted to ensure the completion of what he called Georges' character training by some terms of boarding-school. He considered that Georges was being spoilt at home, and reproached him with the excessive facility of his success at the *lycée*. It was, moreover, his opinion that every boy of good family should pass through the hands of the Reverend Fathers, since it was no longer customary to employ a private, clerical tutor. And St Claude's, which only took boarders, had appealed to him, in its lonely mountain setting, as ideal, for the well-being of the body as well as the mind.

Such masters as Georges could see strolling about the garden walks, smiling at some, nodding to others, did not look very terrible. Georges recalled the visits he had just paid, in company with his parents, to the Superior, the Bursar and the Prefect. The Superior, whose name, like Georges' own, had a "de" in it, had a pompous delivery, was measured in his gestures and distant in his look. Asking a question, he inclined his tall person. He had asked Georges in which church at M., his native town, he had taken his first communion. And he had rejoiced to hear that it had been the cathedral, where he himself had had the happiness of celebrating one of his first masses. Humane memories bound him to the same city—"To its

university, if not to its *lycée*," he said, smiling: it was there that he had read for his arts degree; discreetly, he let it be known that he was a *Licencié ès Lettres*.

The Bursar, by reason of his height and his black beard, was a no less impressive figure. He had blown his nose with explosive violence into a handkerchief as big as a towel, which he had thereafter refolded with great precision. He had signed the receipt for the term's fees holding the pen with the nib towards him: no doubt he had rheumatic hands.

As for the Prefect, he was even taller than the Superior and the Bursar, doubtless to enable him to over-look everybody. He had shown them over the college from cellar to attics. He had shown Georges his place in study-hall and dormitory. He had introduced him to the college Sisters, and instructed the Infirmary Sister to take particular care of him. In the shower-bath room he had pulled the chain in one of the cubicles to show that the showers really worked, and had made his sleeve wet. The boys had a shower every Saturday. Taking leave of Georges' parents he had said, "Your son will be quite at home with us." And he had given Georges a copy of the rules.

Georges took the booklet out of his pocket and read the first page.

*General Rule: A thoroughly Christian education, a sound cultivation of the mind and heart, such is the double aim we have set ourselves. Inveterate laziness, obstinate disobedience, and talking, writing, reading or behaving in a manner contrary to religion or morality are punished by expulsion.*

Here then, on the very threshold, were the Good Fathers attired as armed heralds

offering peace or war. Were they really so warlike?

Georges glanced over the clauses dealing with marks, places in class, reports, mail, the visitors' room, exeats. He skipped the "Statutes of the Congregation" and read the "Statutes of the Academy". It had never occurred to him to be a Congregationist, but he had sometimes dreamed of being a writer, a member of the *Académie Française*. There had been no academy at the *lycee*, but now the college one would enable him to try his hand at it. Candidates had to produce five French compositions with exceptionally high marks. At *lycée* Georges had been top in French; but how good were the Fathers' pupils? Had they, as he had done, secretly read all Anatole France? All? Well, at least half: that author's works are numerous and some among them are boring.

The next page contained the "*Rules for ordinary days*". And those ordinary days certainly began early enough!

"5.30. *Rise.*" How could one possibly get up so early?

"6.0. *Meditation in Study-hall.*" Georges could see himself at it already, meditating with his head in his hands—but meditating on what?

"6.20. *Mass.*" What a quantity of masses were in prospect! Georges would never have heard so many.

"7.0. *Study*"

"7.30. *Breakfast. Recreation.*"

"8.0. *Lessons . . .*" Recreation. Study. Lunch. Recreation. Study. Lessons. Recreation. Lessons. Tea. Study. Sacred reading. Dinner. Bed. What a torrent! But going to bed immediately after dinner made up, on the whole, for rising at cock-crow. At home Georges

did not get up until seven, but then he did not go to bed before ten or eleven at night: it came to the same thing.

So much for the “ordinary days”. There was also a “*Rule for Thursdays and Sundays*” which varied according to the season, of which only two were recognised, “(a) *Winter*, (b) *Summer*.” Below that came the time-table proper to certain days.

“*First term: October:*

“3. *Monday. First day of school. 7 pm Evening Service to the Holy Sacrament.*”

Georges looked at his watch. Service in twenty minutes.

“4. *Tuesday. Classes begin. From Rhetoric to Sixth form, French composition. Beginning of school-year Retreat.*”

The year, then, began well, with French composition: it would give him a chance to show what he was made of immediately. But what was this Retreat, which lasted four days and had its own special rule? Instruction, rosary, lectures and services?

November began with: “*Visit to cemeteries. During the whole octave, masses for the repose of the souls of deceased benefactors.*” Then:

“3. *Thursday. Monthly Exeat.*” So Georges would not see his parents until that date. The Superior had explained that it was best to leave the boys as far as possible undisturbed in their studious and enclosed atmosphere.

Georges closed the time-table booklet. The idea of so much discipline did not frighten him. All those boys he had seen were under the same yoke, and did not seem much the worse for it. No doubt they knew how to make their way among all these rules as light-heartedly as he had seen them making their way about the garden. Now that all the parents were gone and

there were no masters in the garden, some of the boys appeared to be engaged in making a start in defiance of the rules. A group of smokers was gathered about a tree and they were blowing the smoke of their tobacco into its foliage. One boy had picked a flower and a bigger boy, in trying to get it away from him, had knocked him over into a box hedge. Their faces were pressed together in their struggle and it appeared that they were enjoying the fact.

The arrival of a Father spoiled the fun: the smokers concealed their cigarettes in the hollow of their hands, while the wrestlers picked themselves up and went to meet him. Georges watched them pass immediately below the window, the Father's white tonsure, and the bright heads of the two boys. He would have liked to throw something down on them, right in their midst, to show that he was a good shot and not wanting in spirit for a new boy.

He was quite conquered by the college. But would he, now, be able to conquer it? He ran over his advantages: to start with, he was intelligent, there could be no question of that. His memory was excellent. He considered himself capable of talking on any subject whatsoever, and thought that he had penetrated all the mysteries apt to present themselves to a boy of his age. Next, he was as active and strong as any other boy, although little inclined either to games or to fighting. Finally, he thought himself handsome. A boy who thought himself handsome! He could see his reflection in the window-pane and remembered the facetious word-picture of himself which his girl cousins had set down in their *Carnet de confidences*:

*Georges de Sarre. General appearance—well-balanced. Face: oval, unpretentious. Hair: dark chestnut, always scented with lavender-water. Complexion: even, with a few*

*freckles. Eyes: chestnut, sometimes warm, sometimes icy. Mouth: sentimental. Nose: straight. And is the son of a marquis.*

Georges also examined his clothes in the window-pane—they would be a surer recommendation than his birth. His shirt was Oxford blue, his tie red silk; he smiled, remembering that according to his girl cousins, red was the colour of love. He stretched out a leg to inspect his shoes, which were made of very fine leather, and his socks, of a red and blue lozenge-check. As for his suit, it answered, but as elegantly as possible, to the rather vague guidance given by the college prospectus: “An ordinary suit of navy blue cheviot (shorts or trousers).” Georges would have liked shorts but his mother had preferred trousers, saying they were more suitable for a third-form boy: on the whole the trousers, he thought, hung very well.

A great loutish fellow was strutting across the courtyard on his way to ring the bell for the service. At this, the first routine signal of his new existence, Georges, in spite of what he had been thinking, felt his heart contract a little. This first day of school, thus confirmed by the chime, was something very different from those already experienced. The sound of the bell had wiped out the past. The last stragglers were leaving the courtyard. The shouting had ceased. Georges wondered whether he should join his class, then decided it would be easier to stay where he was. It was as if he were acting substitute for the Infirmary Sister. Perhaps he ought to be ready to put invalids to bed in the beds at the far end of the room? But there had been no cases of hysterical despair either among pupils, parents or masters. Nevertheless, Georges would stay there until the end, to bear witness to the fact that college

had reassembled without a hitch.

Now he could see the junior school filing up to the chapel from the right, senior school from the left. They went in by different doors. These were not the faces he had seen a short while ago; now they were masked. Some Fathers came hastening up. The sound of the harmonium grew louder.

Georges, at his window, had seen the whole college pass before him. Among those boys were some who would be his friends. He found fault with the *lycée* because it had provided only schoolfellows, not friends: but he was sure that a boarding-school must be the kingdom of friendship. He was certain that, in this enclosed world, nothing would be like anything he had hitherto experienced. And now he regretted having stayed where he was: he would have liked to be with the others as soon as possible, now.

Had the Sister forgotten him? Had she fallen into his trunk? Or gone to the service? The act of thinking about her seemed to produce her immediately. She switched on the light and gave Georges a napkin, a napkin-ring, knife, fork and spoon. Then she sank into a chair.

“Ah!” she said, “I give you my word I haven’t been wasting my time. But I was interrupted at your unpacking so many times! And I see you missed chapel because of me, just as I have because of you. Shall we say a little prayer for each other?”

“After putting your linen away in the linen-room, I hung up your suits in the dormitory cupboard, a locker with your number on it. I haven’t put your books in the study-hall, as I don’t know which is your place. They’re on your bedside table. You’ll find a locker for your jams or preserves—for tea—in the big cupboard they’ll show you: keep it locked always, and also your clothes locker. We have no thieves among us, but a certain number of nosy-

parkers.”

The Sister punctuated her sentences by nodding her head. “Finally,” she said, “your trunk and suitcase were taken up to the attic, but not until we’d tied a label to them, for we have to think of everything, you know. Naturally, I’ve made your bed, but as you know we do without chambermaids here. But you’ll soon learn to do it, there’s nothing easier. I’ll keep an eye on it myself for the first day or two, to make sure it’s not too untidy.” The chapel doors were opening: the *salut* was over. The boys crossed the garden again, on their way to the refectory. As Georges and the Sister left the infirmary she set the indicator at In the Kitchen. Georges followed her down interminable corridors.

“You’ll be very happy at St Claude’s,” she assured him. “Everyone likes it here. Monseigneur spent a week here during the summer. Your schoolfellows are excellent children and your masters learned and saintly men. You have only to be good and work hard to please your parents and the good God.”

Georges went down the stairs hearing the noises from the refectory get louder and louder. The moment when he must appear before the whole school was getting nearer. Had any of the others paid any attention to him, on such a busy day? He was no longer a spectator, but was about to step onto the stage himself. Quickly, he felt and tightened the knot of his tie. He ran his hands over his hair, but not one was displaced: he had applied ample hair-cream that morning.

He had glanced into the refectory that afternoon, but it was completely changed by the crowd of young faces which now filled it, and by the masters, imposing at their high tables set on platforms at each end of the room. Georges hesitated a moment, intimidated by stares.

Then he made for the tall Prefect whom he could see standing at the far end of the room. Had the Superior, presiding beneath the Crucifix near the door, recognised him? At least he had not been forgotten by the Prefect, who said, amiably:

“Here’s our late-comer, at last!”

He took Georges to his place and introduced him to his neighbours, but left them to introduce themselves. Georges sat down. Surprised to see no table-cloth, he put his silver knife, fork and spoon gently down on the marble surface. Nobody offered him a hand to shake, nor did he offer his own. The plates were chipped. The table was set with jugs of wine, carafes of water, a basket of bread and a steaming soup tureen. Georges was recalled from his thoughts by his neighbour on the left asking him to repeat his name, which had not been clearly enunciated: his own name, he said, was Marc de Blajan.

They were soon getting to know each other. Marc came from S., a town not far from Georges’ own. Perhaps it was for that reason they had been put next to each other; or was it, rather, because of the “de” in their names? But Georges hoped that Blajan was not the son of a marquis: interesting though he might be, his appearance would do no honour to that title; his nose was crooked, his hair sparse and he wore the commonest kind of spectacles; his health, moreover, seemed nothing to be proud of, he was thin and pale. The holidays did not seem to have done him much good—he was already taking medicine, there was a chemist’s bottle and a box of pills in his drawer. The contrast with Georges’ right-hand neighbour could not have been more striking. Georges had recognised him as the strapping lad who had picked a flower, and played the fool in the box hedge. He radiated vitality and strength. Georges liked his laugh, his blue eyes, his black hair, and the sprinkling of freckles which

enlivened his countenance. Such—he introduced himself—was Lucien Rouvère.

After dessert the Superior rang a bell for silence. From the reading-desk set in the middle of the room one of the boys read, standing, the first chapter of *The Imitation of Christ*:

*. . . Strive to detach your heart from the love of visible things; for they who follow where their senses lead them soil their soul and lose the grace of God.*

Then all rose and turned towards the Superior, who said grace. Georges looked at the nape of Rouvère's neck; it looked cool and smelt of lotion.

The dormitory, like the refectory, did not look the same as in the day-time. Here, however, silence reigned, giving an hieratic character to the assembly of boys. Georges knew that he would, following a custom apparently designed to facilitate surveillance, have the same neighbours everywhere. His bed was one from the end, Rouvère's being the last one at the end of the room on the right next to the lockers. He went to look at his things in locker No 25: the Sister had fitted it with a curtain to keep dust off his clothes. She did things well: she knew how to render thanks for the generous offering she had received. His books were carefully stacked beside the sort of low coffer which served as a night-table. But, according to what Marc had told him, the third-form text-books which he had already bought would be useless: the college curriculum was different. Wasn't that a religious joint all over? They had to differ from everyone else!

Some of the boys, such as Rouvère, whose customary sangfroid was not disturbed by

returning to school, gave a touch of animation to the dormitory by going to clean their teeth at the wash-basins. The water from the taps rang loud in the zinc basins. Georges, watching the others, began to undress. He saw naked backs, chests and arms, some white, others golden brown. He put on his pyjamas. Some of the boys wore night-shirts; there were evidently two schools of thought. Georges slipped between the sheets. He had never before gone to bed among so many people. Rouvère, back from the wash-basins, was undressing. He did not turn from Georges, but faced him in a state of nature. He put on his pyjama trousers but had some difficulty in equalising the ends of the cord. At last he succeeded, and jumped into the bed, which he had turned down, in a single motion. He sat up, his head gracefully bowed, biting his nails. Georges regretted that: he had heard that it was evidence of vice in boys. All the boys knelt up on their eiderdowns while the dormitory master on duty said a prayer aloud: its first words were "Sleep is the image of death."

Now the room was dimly lit, only by a night-light. On silent feet the abbe patrolled the room for a few moments, then disappeared: his room adjoined the dormitory, its door being just beyond the great arch which led into it. He drew the curtain across an interior window which overlooked the wash-basins and enabled him to keep an eye on the dormitory. His disappearance was the signal for whispered conversation to begin.

How well Georges and his neighbours were placed in the room, distant as they were from hostile ears! Marc drew Georges' attention to an additional advantage: the dormitory-master could no more catch them unprepared than he could hear them, for they were bound to see him coming—his door, invisible to almost all the others, was at the far end of a diagonal line drawn from their own beds. Blajan drew a geometrical plan of the dormitory in the air.

Then he asked, "Are you frightfully brainy?"

"I got the prize for all-round excellence last year," Georges said.

"The dormitory-master is jolly decent to have put us together," Marc said, laughing. "I was top of the fourth at St Claude's. Oh, the Fathers know what they're doing! They pay careful attention to our records, they know we'll never copy each other's work and can be played off against each other. You *lycée* people must be frightfully advanced—I mean, the masters are so highly qualified. You ought to be able to get into the academy here. It's at least not quite so silly as being a Congregationist. I've been in the academy for a year, now; I'll sponsor you, if you like. But although I'm jolly religious, I simply will not join the Congregation: it's nothing but a den of chaps who've good reason not to want to draw attention to themselves; I find it disgusting."

Georges was glad when Blajan stopped chattering. He was anxious to find out if Rouvère was still awake. Being at the end of the row, Rouvère had only Georges to talk to. The light of the night-light fell upon his face; his eyes were shut, but he opened them as if he had felt Georges looking at him.

"Good night," he said, smiling, and giving Georges his hand; then he turned on his side and drew the covers up to his ears.

Georges was not used to going to bed so early and he could not get to sleep. He thought of the day's events and of his two neighbours: Blajan came from Georges' own world and was brainy. Georges was all the more pleased that the master should have given him Rouvère for a neighbour. He was the boy Georges himself would have chosen, and here was chance or destiny confirming his own choice. But he must tell Lucien not to bite his nails, it

could lead to appendicitis.

He began, then, to think of something else: last night his mother had come to his room to tuck him up and kiss him good night. She had said, "Tomorrow, my little Georges, you will be far away."

And now how far, indeed, she was! And the last holidays, the *lycée*, his own home seemed to Georges even farther away. However he could still picture his own big bedroom, and the thick carpet on which he did his exercises, and the armchair from which the Persian cat watched him doing them with complete indifference, and his book-shelves—but the books he read in bed came from his father's library. And then, the two English prints, "The Blue Boy" and "The Red Boy", above his bed; the delicately made clock, whose chimes evoked the century in which Georges, had he lived then, would have been not a schoolboy but a royal page like that youthful Chevalier de Sarre whose portrait hung in the withdrawing-room.

How could he have supposed that the college would so quickly detach him from all that? From this very night he would no more regret the loss of the comfort and luxury of his home than, tomorrow, he would be regretting the loss of his bicycle: as the Abbé-Prefect had said, henceforth his home was here.

He was dreaming: there was a bell chiming in his dream. It was the cathedral bell at M.; or the bell of the village church, in the holidays; or perhaps the chateau bell ringing for dinner-time; or was it no more than his alarm-clock? Suddenly somebody was shaking Georges by the shoulders and, without understanding what was happening, he saw the face

of a priest hanging above his own and heard a voice saying, "Come along now, out of bed with you!"

Still dazed with sleep he was on his knees, listening to morning prayers: "O God, it is by virtue of Thy goodness that the light of day is restored to me . . ."

Blajan gave him a friendly nod. Georges glanced at Lucien, who smiled at him. He jumped off the bed and put on his slippers, turned out the pockets of his blue suit and gave it a brisk brush—he had certain principles—and hung it in his locker. He took out a plus-four suit and went to the wash-basins.

All of them were taken, and he waited. Each of his schoolfellows had his own way of getting washed. Some shrinkingly splashed a mere handful of water onto their faces. One soaped his whole head under the tap until he looked like a bust covered with suds. Another scrubbed at his face as if he were trying to flay himself, while yet another was so gentle with himself that he seemed to be delicately modelling his own face. Georges' turn came at last. And after hanging his towel over the bottom rail of the bed and shaking hair-lotion onto his head, he propped his mirror up on the bolster to set about combing his hair.

He caught sight of Lucien Rouvère: he was dressing, as he had undressed, with a sovereign contempt for the conventions. Georges looked about for the dormitory-master; he was at the far end of the room. Rouvère, no doubt, was aware of the fact. In any case what could be more natural than his paying no attention to his neighbour? They were, after all, all boys: tomorrow Georges, too, would pay no attention either.

Going into the study-room Georges had only to follow Blajan in order to find his desk, somewhere in the middle rows, with Rouvère on his left, now, and again at the end of a row.

In senior school it was the Superior himself who presided over the “meditation” which it was customary to dedicate to the saint of the day. That morning he confined himself to a short and intimate allocution. Having welcomed his listeners he reminded them of the duties they owed to God and themselves, towards their masters, parents and schoolfellows. He urged them to take part, fervently, in the mass he was about to celebrate, the first of the school year, the Mass of the Holy Ghost. He announced that the Retreat, which would begin that evening, would be preached by an eminent Dominican Father and he expressed the hope that each of them would benefit from it. He had something to say about their Retreat notebooks, which must be handed on to their masters.

Georges studied the boys sitting immediately in front of him, doubtless fourth-formers—the division began with that class, the oldest being at the back of the room. Seen from behind, he found their heads amusing. And he, who had a horror of figures, began counting: he classified and numbered the round heads and the oval, the small, the medium and the large. He classified them by colour. He noted how many had the parting on the right and how many on the left, or their hair brushed straight back, like his own. One dark head had a white tuft; another, chestnut, flaunted some golden locks. Georges had never noticed such things among his comrades at the *lycée*.

He felt himself drawn to these boys, seeing them listen, in religious silence, to words which doubtless left them as indifferent as himself but apt to make them all appreciate their common interests.

In chapel the senior boys went to the right of the choir, in the transept, facing the junior school. Georges found himself in the sixth row. He admired the Superior’s handsome

bearing in his red chasuble. Only the high altar enjoyed the privilege of bell and clapper, and robes for those serving the mass. At the other altars, some placed in the galleries, others situated in the apse, the masters said each his own mass, each served by a pupil. What a number of scarlet masses were to be seen on all sides! The school year was beginning by flaunting love's colour!

As the school filed into the nave, the choir, grouped about the harmonium, began to sing. Suddenly, the Father choir-master raised his baton and began to beat time majestically, as if to harmonise the whole choir. But it was a solo singer who raised his voice sweetly in the following strange words:

*“Come, Spirit of love,  
Descend this day into my soul.  
Come, Spirit of love  
Come, for my soul belongs to Thee.”*

The choristers took up the chant, and then everyone joined in singing more or less in time, the chapel master conscientiously beating time first towards the nave, then towards the transept.

There was a large number of communicants. Georges was left sitting almost alone on his bench. He ostentatiously displayed his beautiful rosary of blue stones, wishing to show that he was, at least, praying, even though he did not take communion. Rouvère and Blajan had both moved up to the holy table. Doubtless they, like the others, had been to confession

before the term began, in order to be able to take communion that morning. But whereas Blajan had followed the service with care, Rouvère had paid very little attention, and had even been humming when he ought to have been giving the response. His piety was merry. Georges made up his mind to get his people to send him a little rug, like the one Lucien had, in order to make kneeling less uncomfortable.

That day the study period which came directly after mass was cut. They went straight to the refectory for breakfast. Their coffee and milk was already waiting for them, poured into aluminium bowls. Georges thought, rather ruefully, of his breakfast chocolate at home, unctuous, frothy, flavoured with vanilla, and ponderous in its cup of Chinese porcelain. The soft bread, too, was very insipid, as he thought of hot, buttered rusks. However, these regrets lasted no longer than those of the previous evening.

During the following break the rule which required the boys to play games was allowed to lapse for that morning. Marc took Georges in hand and did the honours of the place:

This part of the courtyard was reserved to senior boys. Over there was the farm which belonged to the college, near the waterfall which they could hear from where they stood. In spring these mulberry-trees nourished, with their leaves, the silk-worms kept by the old history master who was also famous for his pet white mouse. Then, there was the drinking-water tap, the wall for Basque *pelota*, and the football field. That window there belonged to Father Lauzon's room: he was director of the Congregation and also mathematics master. The other windows were those of the dormitory. If you went down that narrow alley you came out on the conservatory terrace, below which was the grotto with the statue of St Claude.

Lucien Rouvère and the tall boy he had been playing with yesterday were walking about together.

Form-room at last. Georges had made the rounds of his domain. His form-master—French-Latin-Greek—was dry, bald, and nicknamed *le Tatou*. He addressed a few amiable remarks to his pupils, not without a shade of irony directed at the two or three notorious hard cases. Then, perceiving new faces, he called the roll; there were twenty boys. For Georges he had a very flattering word of praise; and he congratulated him on having enrolled in an establishment of Christian education.

Finally, he read out the list of classical books they were to obtain from the bursar, and gave them the page and number of the Latin text for that evening's prep. After which he read out the title of the French composition they were to write: "A tourney under François I." Nothing could have been better: it would enable Georges de Sarre and Marc de Blajan to break a lance together.

"I don't care for François the First," Marc said, "I only like Louis the Fourteenth."

Georges had an idea he would emerge victorious from the joust.

During the study period which followed the short ten-o'clock break they filled in chits for extras and confessions. Confession chits? They were still under Louis XV, at the time of the Bull *Unigenitus* and of

“. . . *ces billets si fameux*  
*Que les morts aux enfers emportaient avec eux.*"

Georges dealt with the extras first. He wrote, “Meat with the evening meal. Piano lessons.” Rouvère had asked for exactly the same things. Blajan, as Georges knew already, was taking no extras, either on principle or by way of economy, and had mocked those delicate creatures who were in need of special dishes and music. All he ever took was medicine.



Georges looked to see what name Marc had written on his other chit and saw that it was Father Lauzon. He remembered Marc saying that Father Lauzon was, like himself, from S. Had he been in Marc's place Georges would not have considered that a good reason for choosing the Father as his confessor: a director of the Congregation and mathematics master to boot—the combination had no charm for him. The sciences were not his strong point; besides, it seemed to him it would be awkward to have one of his own masters as confessor. No other name occurring to him, he was about to put himself into the Father

Bursar's hands, when he happened to glance at Rouvère's chit. What on earth . . . ! Rouvère had written the same name as Blajan. Georges immediately wrote, in the customary formula, "G. de Sarre wishes to be Father Lauzon's penitent." Blajan, to whom he showed his chit, no doubt imagined that the choice had been inspired by himself.

Four at a time the pupils of each form paid a visit to the Bursar's office. There were some among them who, upon their return, looked fearfully upon the books piled before them on their desks. Others turned the pages respectfully, being careful not to break the spines, then carefully wrote their names at the top of the blank page facing the title page.

As there was no prep set for study that day, the invigilating Father gave the boys permission to write to their parents: this was an exception, the rule being that letters must be written on Sundays. Lucien, his letter finished, began writing notes in a pocket-book. Well hidden behind a pile of dictionaries, for he was adept at avoiding the attention of the master, he smiled over his own writings.

That day, Georges was introduced to the manner in which meals began in college. After grace, the Superior uttered these words: *Deo gratias*. That was the signal for conversations to begin—as if to render thanks to God by exercising the gift of speech. The pupil who stood at the refectory lectern then left his post, since there was to be no reading. Next to the Superior sat the preacher already announced to them: his white frock and shaven head attracted many eyes: but a ringing of the bell put an end to this curiosity.

Georges did not know that Blajan was table-prefect, for the evening before no regular writ had run. Now, however, all was done in earnest, and Blajan portioned out the omelette, not without pride.

Rouvère talked of his holidays: he had been camping in the mountains, swimming in lakes, and had greatly improved his tennis.

For dessert two kinds of fruit were served: apples and almonds. This, like the walk to follow, was a first-day-of-term treat. Thereafter the boy whose turn it was to read aloud returned to the lectern and read from the Martyrology according to the rite for noon.

*The fourth day of October at Assisi in Umbria, birth into Heaven of St Francis, confessor, founder of the Order of Friars Minor, whose Life, full of holy acts and miracles, was set down by St Bonaventure . . .*

*And in Egypt of the Holy Martyrs Marcus and Marcian, brothers; and of a well-nigh innumerable multitude of other martyrs of both sexes and all ages, of whom some were burnt after having endured the lash and other horrible tortures, others cast into the sea, some few decapitated, several consumed by starvation, some nailed to gibbets, and yet*

*others hung up with their heads below their feet . . .*

*And in Alexandria of those holy priests and deacons Caius, Faustus. Eusebius, Cheremon, Lucius and their companions.*

*And at Bologna of St Petronius, bishop and confessor . . .*

The horrifying details and exotic names which caused the reader to stumble provoked sly smiles on many faces. Georges, however, was pleased to encounter his two neighbours in all this splendour: Marcus and Lucius. He liked Lucien as Lucius. Rouvère! Lucius Veras! An emperor. One might surely pay him a little court without loss of face. Marcus recalled, surely, one of the heroes of *Quo Vadis*? The day's list also included St Petronius. He was not, however, the Petronius of the novel, who had died, crowned with roses, by opening his veins. St Petronius must, no doubt, have died quite differently.

They set out for the walk. After passing through the little village near the college, they made towards the mountains. Passing through a wood of sweet chestnuts, the boys began stooping to pick up the nuts which lay all over the path in their half-open husks. But they had to be deft to avoid pricking their fingers, and swift to avoid attracting the attention of the Supervisor of Studies, who would insist upon respect for other people's property.

They came to a flat, open field and a number of football games were organised. Georges and Marc, having little liking for the game, were satisfied to look on. For even here the rule was not yet being strictly applied.

Lucien, in the team made up from his form, was performing deeds of prowess. The tall boy who seemed so interested in Lucien was keeping goal for another side; Georges led

Blajan towards him. How old was he? Georges wondered. About sixteen probably. He was well-built, bold, with an open, smiling face and eyes which were fiery. Moreover he was good at the game: he had just succeeded in stopping a shot by throwing himself on the ball and there were shouts of "Oh, well played, Ferron! Played, André."

He had taken the skin off his elbow. "And I've left my handkerchief in my jacket," he said.

Georges took his own handkerchief from a pocket and approached to offer it.

"Thanks," André said. "Would you mind tying it on for me." And he added, "You're in the third, aren't you? Next to Rouvère."

The other players gathered round. Georges went back to Blajan.

"Nice chap, Ferron," he said.

"Oh, they all are," Marc replied, with a peculiar inflection and expression.

Georges asked him what he was hinting at.

"You know," Marc said, after a moment's thought, "there are two kinds of chaps here—as everywhere else. But there's no doubt the bad ones are in a majority. You'll have to choose between them, you'll find."

"What do you mean, bad?"

"Well, I certainly don't mean those who cheat at hide-and-seek! Call those who are pure, good, and the impure, bad."

"If I understand you correctly, Ferron belongs to the second category?"

"Exactly. I have known the worthy Ferron for quite a long time. I watched him at work when he was in the junior school, where he was always making converts—of a certain kind.

I should add that he seems to have settled down a good deal since last year, for as far as I know he no longer has a titular favourite. Possibly, however, he has merely become more discreet.”

These confidences, which were accompanied by a snigger, filled Georges with bitterness. Lucien could no longer be the friend he had hoped for. The place he had coveted was already occupied; and Georges knew, now, by what kind of friend.

“I have often wondered,” Marc continued, “how boys of that kind can have the health necessary for getting through their work. But sooner or later they’re bound to come a cropper.”

On the way back to college Georges touched the crumpled handkerchief, in his pocket, which Ferron had returned to him. The tip of his finger came in contact with the clot of dried blood left by the cut. He loathed that blood. He must get himself a clean handkerchief.

Lucien was two files in front of him. How lightly and easily he carried himself! Almost as if he were walking on tip-toe. He certainly did not look like a person who was about to come a cropper. Whereas Marc, poor chap, was already complaining of being tired and out of breath! Were his remarks on the subject of André really justified? Perhaps it was jealousy which made him talk like that about boys whose health was sound. He saw impurity where health was. And perhaps Georges’ own suspicions were no better founded? Perhaps Lucien was not yet in André’s power. There was no need to give up so soon: it was only the second day of term.

In study, that evening, before beginning work Georges turned to see where Ferron was sitting. His rival was a long way off. They could work in peace. The work in question was

the translation of a Latin text for *le Tatou*: “*Time cannot make us forget our fatherland.*”

Georges, making a fair copy, remembered something Marc had told him, that one had to write in the top left-hand corner the initials J. M. J.—Jesus, Mary, Joseph—and, top centre, a little cross. He had not done so at the head of his composition: it would be a bit hard if it made him lose marks, especially since Marc, having read Georges’ first draft, had humbly confessed himself vanquished.

At the first sound of the bell one boy from each class rose and collected the work and delivered it to the master. Georges was entertained by the pride which the holders of these petty offices displayed. He ran over in his mind all those he had already noticed: there was a boy who collected chits at the beginning of study; the boy who was table-perfect; the refectory leader; the boy who served out the bread at tea-time; the bell-ringer; the ink-well filler; the librarian; the file leader, out walking. No doubt such privileges were fought for like places under the *ancien regime*, such places as Visitor of Tides, Commissioner for Ashes, or Inspector of Fodder.

The Retreat was initiated in the junior school study-room. The junior school boys had been crowded together on the front benches in order to make room for their elders. A few of them turned round but their prefect called them to order by snapping his fingers. Meanwhile the Dominican, upright at his lectern with his hands crossed on his chest and his eyes turned up to Heaven, appeared to be in a trance.

Chairs placed about the platform were reserved for the Superior and the Father-Prefects of each division. The other masters sat on benches placed against the walls. There was a certain element of disorder involved in getting the senior boys to their places. At last, after

an initial prayer, everyone was seated. Georges had not lost his two usual neighbours, but he noticed that André was sitting at Lucien's other side.

The preacher began by quoting some verse with a great deal of feeling:

*Little boys with golden locks,  
You whose souls are censers . . .*

He asked the boys listening to him, "to remember these words, written by a Christian poet" and applicable, no doubt, to the dark as well as the fair.

"Let this college," he cried, "resemble a great censer all the year round! Be worthy of the ephemeral grace which beams in your faces, but even worthier of the grace of God which beams in your hearts. Try to be worthy, too, in some measure, of the great examples with which your youth is provided by religious history. It is often during childhood that superlative virtue reveals itself, as we may see from the example of St Vincent de Paul, who, at the age of fourteen, turned hermit. And there are many other examples of which I shall take occasion to speak to you in the course of each sermon. But I want to write up, this very evening, the names of the most glorious boys, in your study-room, the names of those who did not deny God the homage of their life's blood. Such were St Justin of Auxère who died for the faith at nine years of age; St Cyril of Caesarea, at ten; St Mammès of Cappadocia, martyred at twelve; St Just of Alcala and St Guy at thirteen; St Pancras at fourteen; SS Agapit and Venant at fifteen; St Donatien and St Rogatien in the flower of their adolescence. It will cost you, however, nothing to be good Christian boys. Surely, in this comfortable

house, you will at least have the courage for that?

“I have shown you the heights; I must now point out the depths. A child is the world’s crown of beauty, yet he may, alas! know all the ugliness of sin. There are children of light; but there are also children of perdition: the brow of such a boy is none the less luminous, yet his soul is plunged in darkness. One day, when St Gregory the Great was crossing the Roman marketplace, he noticed some little boys who were strikingly beautiful and who were being offered for sale as slaves, for in the sixth century slavery had not been abolished. He asked where they came from. On being told that they were Angles, that is from England, which had not yet received the faith, “Call them, rather, angels,” he said, “were it not that they are still under the yoke of the demon.” My children, never forget this: demons may sometimes wear the faces of angels—and, after all, what, indeed, are they but fallen angels?

“To remain pure, as you are, or to be purified again if, unfortunately, you should be so no longer, you must watch and pray according to the commandment of Him who called Himself the Son of Man. Pray, for in prayer is salvation. Watch, for the enemy has his eye on you. Watch over your friendships for they may be that enemy. Let them never become of that kind of special friendships which foster nothing but sensibility: for, as Bourdaloue tells us, sensibility readily turns into sensuality. Let your friendships be open and public and of the spirit. You will then be like those pious boys that St Benedict had about him at Subiaco in what he called his school, “the school of life”. Among their number were two boys of patrician stock, united in friendship, who had become his favourite disciples. Their names were Maur and Placidius, and they have been placed by the Church among the company of the saints. Placidius, being about fifteen years old, was drawing water from the lake of

Subiaco, when he lost his balance and fell and the current drove him far from the shore. St Benedict, in his cell, was informed of this by an internal voice. "Run quickly," he said to Maur, "the boy has just fallen into the water." Maur, with miraculous faith, flung himself into the lake; the water bore him up, and he was able to save his friend.

"Tomorrow, October the fifth, is the feast of St Placidius. Begin your school year under that saint's blessing. Ask him to grant you holy friendships which will save you from dangers. Ask him, above all, that it may be granted you to be worthy of the Supreme Friend, who will reward you in Heaven for all eternity, and to whom you can say, in the words of À-Kempis, 'Thou art in truth my well-beloved . . .'"

Georges heard these words, and they stamped themselves on his pitiless memory, yet his train of thought did not remain at that point. His attention was barely distracted by Blajan, who had written the names of all the young saints on a piece of paper. He was thinking of André Ferron who sat beside Lucien and listened calmly to this condemnation of special friendships.

They went into chapel for the evening service in honour of the Host. During that same service on the day before Georges had known nothing about the college but its rules: but now he already knew only too much about aspects of it which were outside those rules.

The Superior, in his stall, was singing half a beat ahead of all the rest. The chapel master exerted himself more energetically than ever. Blajan held his book in both hands. Lucien's was on the ledge, upside down.

In the refectory Georges noticed that Ferron sat at a table facing his, which enabled him to catch Lucien's eye from time to time. How was it that Blajan had never noticed all these

little manoeuvres? No doubt it was because he made too much of André's prudence and was not in the least interested in Lucien.

Georges only needed, now, to mark his rival's place in the dormitory. There, at least, he felt even easier than in the study-room—the other boy was at the far end of the row of beds.

When the Supervisor of Studies had made himself scarce, Georges felt something drop onto his bed: it was a piece of chocolate which his right-hand neighbour had thrown him. Georges thanked him and, turning towards him, began eating the little squares, which were full of nuts.

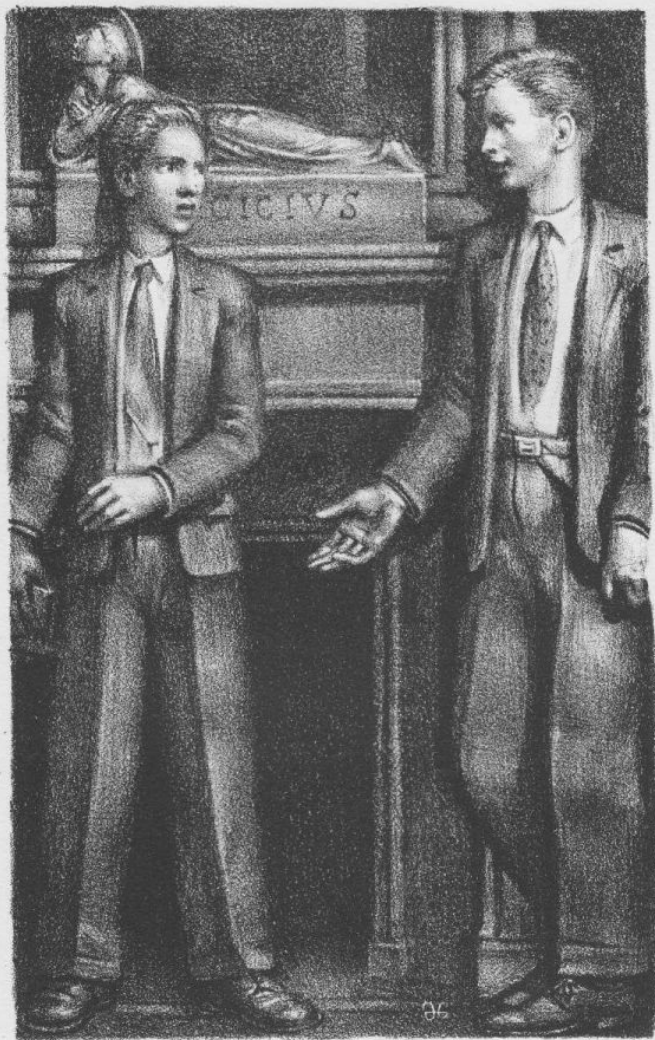
“It's jolly good,” he said.

“I've got a supply. We'll eat some every night.”

The words “every night” were more delicious to Georges than the squares of nut chocolate. They seemed to mean that Lucien was already admitting that Georges had certain claims on him. “What month were you bom?” Lucien asked.

“July. July 16th. And you?”

“November 6th. Our birthdays are the same—within four months and ten days!”



Georges laughed and Lucien said, "Have you ever had your horoscope drawn—you ought to, seeing how clever you are." "No. That's one point where I don't know so much as you."

"I've an uncle who's keen on astrology. He once informed me that, at my birth, the sun was in Scorpio, my Venus well exposed, and the moon in ten, like Joan of Arc."

"Congratulations. You must tell me what it means some time. Meanwhile, I'm no longer surprised that you're so hot at football. Your stars did you proud this afternoon."

"I enjoyed myself."

"There's some good players in the top forms, too. Ferron, particularly."

"Yes, he is."

"It was him you were with, wasn't it, yesterday, in the courtyard, in break this morning, and this evening at the sermon?" "I say! You'd make a first-class detective!"

"I observe; but I don't go in for denunciations."

"That's as well. We don't care for sneaks at St Claude's." "What harm can there be in noticing that you were with Ferron?"

"None, but we'd just as soon not be noticed."

"Really, you surprise me. Do we have to conceal our friendships, here? At all events I have not the same ideas as our worthy preacher in this matter—as in many others. Moreover, you'll find me the soul of discretion."

Lucien appeared to be thinking this over, as Blajan had done before delivering himself

on the subject of bad boys; then he leaned out of bed so that he could lower his voice still further.

“Listen,” he said, “I feel safe with you and although I’ve only known you since yesterday, I’m going to tell you about it. You’ll be the only one I’ve ever told it to. And incidentally, how about it—I mean, no secrets as between us two and, apart from ourselves—total secrecy?”

He offered his hand, more solemnly than he had done the previous evening: their pact was sealed; and he resumed, in a whisper, “The fact is, André Ferron is my friend. Last year we swore blood-brotherhood—mixed our blood, you know. You make a little cut in your arm and then each of you drinks a few drops of the other’s blood, and after that you are united in life and death.

“André had his bed opposite mine, over there in the middle group, where that ass is now. At night he used to come and talk to me. That was our best time of the day. Now that they’ve changed our places he’d have to cross the whole dormitory on hands and knees. It’s not possible. As a rule we try to avoid being seen together in break—yesterday and today were exceptions. And we’re careful not to be without the best references—I mean we’re both members of the Congregation, take communion every morning, and so forth.

“We scored a real triumph during the holidays. André managed to get his parents to choose the same place where I was spending a month with mine. We had to pretend the meeting was accidental. Our families got to be friends and we were urged to keep each other company all the time! I mean, naturally—being at the same school and both Children of Mary! André helped me with my work, we got my holiday task out of the way in a week—

Greek, Latin, the lot. He taught me to play tennis. We did some marvellous trips together—the best was when we spent a whole night sleeping out, up in the mountains.

“André’s a poet, he dedicates some of his poems to me. I’ll let you read them. I copy them into an exercise-book, where I also keep notes of our best times in the holidays, my impressions of things, and my resolutions. That’s my *real* Retreat notebook.”

Lucien had spared Georges nothing. He had positively poured out his heart, expanding wonderfully in the heart of his new friend. And the consequence was that Georges hated André more than ever and was all the more anxious to become Lucien’s best and only friend.

At meditation the Superior expressed his pleasure at the large number of communicants at the Mass of the Holy Ghost.

“I see in that,” he said, “a gratifying proof that the majority of you spent your holidays well, that they were holy days indeed, in which you did not lose the habit of performing your religious duties. I hope that the rest will not, for their own sakes, be slow to imitate you. The eucharist ought to be the dew which daily refreshes your young souls.”

Another mass with red vestments. Georges turned the pages of the fat missal which Marc had made him get from the Bursar’s office. It had nearly two thousand pages of thin Bible-paper. “Temporal cycle, Sanctoral cycle” . . .

Good Lord, what terms! A historical note—or notion—on every ecclesiastical feast-day. The Common of saints of various categories. Numbered prayers for every occasion. Pious vignettes; a map of Galilee; a map of St Paul’s journeys . . .

When the time for communion came Georges was embarrassed to find himself left

completely alone—at least as regards the first six benches. Among the juniors, who went up to the holy table together with the senior boys, there were, indeed, a number of abstentions, whereas the latter were taking communion *en masse*. Georges had the feeling that he was making himself conspicuous. It seemed to him that the Superior was eyeing him with suspicion. This could not go on. One really must conform to the customs of the place.

Although, in principle, confession was scheduled for Saturdays, Georges made up his mind to see his confessor that day. Those who had abstained, like himself, from communion the day before must have gone, in study time, and had themselves washed clean of sin. It was that, no doubt, which had enabled them to respond so promptly to the Superior's encouraging words.

True, Georges probably recalled the conversation he had had with his friend in bed, but he could hardly see emulators of Lucien in such a number of boys. He was even inclined to think that Lucien had exaggerated in his own case, just as much as Blajan had surely done in that of the other boys. In the half-light of the dormitory, as in the privacy of walking in pairs, he had believed what he was told. But now, in the presence of the altar, he no longer believed. As for himself, despite his very moderate piety, he could certainly not see himself taking the sacrament in a spirit of derision.

During Retreat there were fewer lesson periods. That morning they gave way to a prolonged religious instruction, the two divisions of the school being separated. The Superior took the senior school and spent the time in reading and explaining a text of Bossuet's on divine love. Really, St Claude's seemed to be very preoccupied with love.

The following study-period was given over solely to Retreat exercise-books. Georges,

thinking over what he proposed to write, came to the conclusion that the preacher had more or less contradicted himself: were boys to be considered as angels, or demons? He was reminded of the words *College* and *Collegian* as treated by the *Grand Larousse*. Under *College* were quoted texts dealing with the “pure, simple and holy friendships of college days”; whereas under *Collegian* there occurred a reference to certain “dangers” and “vices” followed by this simple note: “Those who have themselves been Collegians will know what we mean.”

Marc de Blajan was writing, in capitals, on the first page of his exercise-book, a quotation from the Dominican’s sermon: “Watch and pray.”

Georges, reacting against this, resolved to deal only with the seraphic aspect of the subject. Not content with the “little boys with golden locks”, he referred to such poems of the same order as are to be found in *Morceaux Choisis*: “Children, you are the dawn . . .”, “O child, sacred head . . .”, “Ah! If I were the dear little child . . .”

There was a history period in the afternoon. The master was old and dwarfish. His face looked as if it were made of papier-mache. A few white hairs served him for eyebrows. He wore his spectacles so low down on his nose that they pinched his nostrils and gave him a nasal accent. He had been rather hasty in shaving, for his ears were full of dried soap. After giving a brief glance at the Contemporary Epoch, he dictated the heads of an analytical and synoptic table for its first chapter—*The Ancien Regime in France*. He gave one of the boys a pattern of this table to pass round the class: it was to be copied in every detail and he advised his pupils to do it carefully.

This table, drawn up on a double sheet of paper, gave, when opened up, the impression

of being a palette. It was criss-crossed with ink and pencil lines in various colours. Notes touching the king and the court were in blue; black ink was used for matters relating to the clergy; the nobility was treated in green, the judiciary in red, the third estate in yellow. Some names were thickly, others thinly, underlined and all flourishes were admirably penned. All sub-divisions were in pairs, but variously indicated—I, II; 1st, 2nd; (A), (B); (a), (b). It must surely have been the history master who was responsible for reducing the seasons to two, in the school rules book.

Next came another session of religious instruction: more Bossuet, more Divine Love—and to conclude, the spirit of sacrifice. The Superior was crazy about Bossuet and the Grand Siècle in general. At the academy, over which he presided, Bossuet was, according to Marc de Blajan, regarded as the supreme master. Marc felt perfectly at home in that atmosphere, since he liked the Sun King. Georges began to wonder whom, among the great, he himself could find to like. He might choose between Alexander the Great and Gregory the Great. He already admired the former and the preacher had made much of the latter.

At tea-time Lucien came and sat by Georges, who enjoyed watching him eat a pomegranate, bending forward to avoid getting the juice on his clothes. He gave Georges a quarter and received some of Georges' nougat in return.

"I shall call this cultivating the spirit of sacrifice," Georges said.

"Which will be cultivating the spirit of St Claude's," Lucien said, "since, here, the whole art of getting on is to know in what light to present things.

"Last year," he continued, "during the winter, I invented some pains in the heart which attacked me as soon as I got out of bed. Another chap, in another class" (here he gave

Georges a sly look), “was seized, oddly enough, by the same complaint. As soon as we’d washed we each went to the sick-bay, where we sat by the fire at our ease, but refused to take any medicine whatsoever in order, as we said, that we might take communion. We went down to chapel in our own good time, returned to the sickbay afterwards in order to dodge prep, and remained there until breakfast-time. Now note this—if we hadn’t thought of the communion trick we’d have been treated as malingerers, whereas in the event we had a week of very agreeable mornings.”

During study Georges passed up a chit to see Father Lauzon, adding the word “Confession” in brackets. He hoped to persuade the Father to receive his confession in the chapel, as he did in the case of his Saturday penitents. He had heard that confessions were sometimes heard in the masters’ rooms, and he thought he would be less troubled by shame in the discreet twilight of a confessional, than on a prie-dieu.

When he had made a fair copy of his Greek translation exercise—Xenophon’s *War and Agriculture*, he opened his desk to take out a book while waiting for permission to go to Father Lauzon. He chose the *History of Antiquity*, which he had taken good care not to leave at home. He had had it since being in the sixth form at *lycée* and it was in this book that his mind wandered and journeyed most readily.

It seemed to him odd to be looking, that day and in that study-room, at the familiar pictures: Greek children at school; actors in the theatre; Alexander . . . He re-read that “Alexander, the son of Philip, was celebrated for his beauty”, but the picture hardly gave an impression of a beauty so striking. Georges thought of a gold stater, bearing the effigy of his hero, which was kept in the cabinet of ancient coins at home. On the coin, certainly,

Alexander was really handsome, so that one could understand why he had been celebrated for his beauty.

Father Lauzon came in person to fetch Georges. He led the way towards his room. Going up the stairs Georges reassured himself: after all, it would be more private than in chapel; and it would be a bond between penitent and confessor. And his choice of confessor, quite apart from Marc's and Lucien's example, had not been a bad one, since Father Lauzon was the mathematics master, and Georges was particularly weak in mathematics. His confessor might be inclined to be indulgent with his weakness. Georges felt a good deal ashamed of these ideas: he was cultivating the college spirit almost too readily.

Never before had he been in a master's, or a priest's, room. On the table, which was laden with books, stood a coloured plaster statue of the Blessed Virgin and a lamp whose shade was extended by means of a pinned newspaper. In one corner were the bed and wash-stand half concealed by a screen; in another, a prie-dieu on which lay a surplice and stole.

The Father was very nice to him. His manner of speech was elegant and his gestures smooth and measured. His blue eyes, slightly curly hair and fresh complexion, gave him a look of candour which well became a Director of the Congregation.

He was already well-informed concerning Georges, whom he called his first penitent of the year. He had wanted, he said, to receive Georges in his room on this occasion in order to have a little chat with him. He would always be at Georges' disposal if he could give him any guidance whether in the field of his studies or in the matter of his conscience.

Georges waited long enough to say that in mathematics the results he obtained were not always in accord with his efforts but that he hoped, at St Claude's, to be, if not more

fortunate, at least even more assiduous. Then he made for the prie-dieu.

Father Lauzon put on his surplice and violet stole, and sat down on the edge of a chair. Georges knelt, wondering what Lucien's confessions must be like if he had told the truth concerning the spirit in which he took communion? And was he, Georges, to emulate him? Was he to begin the school year with a lie? The simplicity of this tribune of penitence, instead of making him feel ashamed, as he had feared it would, touched him.

When he rose from his knees he noticed a print pinned to the wall beside the crucifix: the "Adoration of the Lamb". It was this, no doubt, which had led the Father to speak of the purity of the Lamb, in his exhortation.

At that evening's sermon a stricter discipline prevailed. The juniors did not turn round as the senior boys filed into the room, and the latter went to their places in an orderly manner, so that André was not able to slip into a seat beside Lucien. The Dominican announced that he proposed to talk on the subject of purity: it seemed to be the order of the day. He began with a little etymology, declaring that the word *pure* came from the Latin *puer*, meaning a boy; the Sanscrit word, he said, had the same root. Then, as on the previous evening, he gave some statistics, to wit the number of servants of God who had taken a vow of chastity in their childhood. At six years of age there was the Blessed Peter of Luxemburg, who was made a cardinal at fifteen and died shortly afterwards; at nine, St Louis de Gonzaga, whose modesty was so great that he never let his body-servant see so much as the tips of his toes—it was for this reason that the Church had thought him worthy to be named the patron saint of youth, together with St Stanislas Kostka. Concerning this saint we are told that even as a young child he fainted away if he heard an immodest word. At ten years of age St Jean de

Matha vowed himself to the Holy Virgin. At thirteen there were St Henry, future emperor, and St Edmund, whose youthful piety illuminated the end of the twelfth century. Followed an anecdote in honour of St Edmund:

One day, when he was a schoolboy and had been walking with some of his schoolfellows, he left them in order to avoid overhearing their perverse conversation. Presently a boy, perfect in beauty, appeared before him and said, with great charm, "Greetings, my beloved." Edmund appearing much disconcerted, the boy added, "Do you not recognise me?" "You must be mistaken," said Edmund. "What! Why, it is I who am always beside you in school, and who accompany you wherever you go. My name is Jesus."

How very curious this preacher's stories were! Beauty played as great a part in his discourses as in Greek history!

Suddenly Georges, who had his arms folded on his desk, realised that his right hand was very near to Lucien's left. Keeping it concealed by his elbow he moved it forward and touched his friend. And it seemed to him that he was accomplishing something of importance as if, at that very moment, he were deciding his whole future. The confession he had just made now seemed as factitious as the preacher's voice, as unreal and as academic.

Now he had his hand pressed firmly against Lucien's, who did not withdraw. He did not dare look to see if Lucien was smiling. Possibly his action appeared to the other as no more than a kind of bravado, a gesture deriding the sermon on purity.

When they filed out of the room Lucien, having said a word to the master in charge, disappeared. A few minutes later, in the chapel, Georges was astounded to see him standing by the altar, in a red frock and surplice, with André.

Lucien was manipulating the censor; he looked quite romantic. Was he dwelling upon poetry? And if so, was it André's, or that written by the Christian poet—the one about boys whose souls are censers? And what would the preacher have thought of it—he who, wearing red vestments, was officiating in honour of that St Placidius whose friendship with St Maur he had proposed to them, yesterday in his sermon, as a model?

Georges glanced quickly over the assembly: nobody, not even Blajan, seemed to be paying the slightest attention to André or Lucien. And this general unawareness exasperated him. His jealousy of André was becoming intolerable: his small victory, during the sermon, now seemed to him pitiful. He realised the immense distance he was lagging behind his rival: on André's side were the existing order of things and all the resources of the college cunningly exploited.

Lucien came late into the refectory, and André a moment after him. As he sat down Lucien said, "This being a choir-boy is a frightful bore. They won't catch me for that again in a hurry." But at the same time he gave Georges a nudge with his knee, giving him to understand that he meant precisely the opposite but had to conceal his pleasure. He was very pleased with himself, humming a tune, laughing for no reason. He chided Georges for having such a poor appetite, and insisted upon filling his plate for him. And André, across the room, looked just as high-spirited.

Up in the dormitory Georges waited impatiently for the master to withdraw, anxious to hear what Lucien would have to tell him. But Lucien had fallen asleep. Had Georges forgotten that he was only second-fiddle in friendship? Not only was he excluded from participation in Lucien's pleasures: he had no right, even, to expect an account of them. He

was thrown back on Marc for conversation.

The excellent Blajan was, in his turn, only too happy to share some of his secrets with Georges; like Lucien's they were concerned with the recent holidays. Secrets seemed to have a quick turnover in that dormitory. Blajan had vowed his heart to one of his girl cousins, with whom he spent the summer in the country. In order not to be left behind Georges countered with *two* girl cousins who had been staying at his home; not that either of them inspired him with overmuch enthusiasm. Marc wanted to know what the prettier of the two was called, and seemed satisfied to hear that her name was Liliane. He then wanted to know the colour of her hair, but Georges was unable to satisfy him as to the exact colour of her eyes. Marc then completed the description of his own adored one and promised to show Georges her photograph no later than the morrow; he kept it in his mass-book. This cousin of his was, indeed, the object of his prayers, as of his thoughts; it was to be worthy of her that he was making such an excellent Retreat, and taking notes during the sermons.

Before going to sleep Georges again dwelt upon that evening's service, with André and Lucien officiating. The passions and intrigues fermenting between the walls of the college made him restless. With no love-tokens or memories, and no hopes of friendship, he found himself a very dull dog.

During mass he made an effort to pull himself together and prepare himself for communion. He had, hitherto, made communion infrequently, and it was an act which inspired him with a good deal of respect. As for the rather too keen pleasure he had experienced in touching Lucien's hand, expiation had followed so swiftly and been so cruel

that he considered himself absolved.

He thought of Marc, praying there beside him—after having discreetly shown him the picture as promised. Well, he too would pray: he would pray for Lucien. Perhaps he would be able to forge a stronger bond between them than André had done: he would have religion and virtue in his favour. He would be worthy of those holy boys praised by the Dominican preacher. *His* pious friendship would triumph over the other's sinful one. But he could not contrive to keep his mind on the service; he could not prevent his attention from straying to Lucien, who was looking at himself in a little mirror held in clasped hands.

Georges passed over the “common for a confessor *non pontif*”, and looked for a prayer he had noticed when turning the pages: like his linen it bore the number 25; it was “a prayer for banishing evil thoughts”. He read it and re-read it. He took holy communion between Marc and Lucien.

The third form had mathematics and English periods that morning, but the first period was free and Georges did as his class-mates—took out his Retreat exercise-book with a view to making notes on the last sermon. Marc lent him the list of saints who had made vows of chastity at less than fifteen years of age. Georges, in his new zeal, had soon finished his copy, not without making all sorts of vows on his own account. How true it was that the happy results of holy communion could hardly be exaggerated.

“Lend me your exercise-book,” Lucien said, “my purity is thirsting for your notes!”

Yet he had been at the sermon yesterday evening: he had, of course, forgotten what had happened there just as he had forgotten what had been said. He had been as remote from Georges as from the preacher. He was, no doubt, already thinking of the meeting which was

to come at evensong: his whole being had been given up to André.

André, always André! Even here and now he was in their midst. Lucien had made room on his desk by shoving his exercise-books towards Georges and the top one bore the following title: *Rough draft of holiday tasks*. Georges seemed to see images of the holiday Lucien had described to him so vividly rising from the book like ghosts: between those covers were the tasks André had done for him. Georges could not resist the desire to have a look at them. He took up the exercise-book gently, though he would have liked to tear it to pieces.

Between two of its pages he came upon a loose sheet of paper and on it was written a poem signed *André Ferron*. It was dedicated, simply, *Pour toi*, and dated August 17.

*Ami, te souvient-il de ce soir éclatant  
Où les fleurs du jardin s'étoilaient parmi l'ombre?  
Nous avions, au tennis, fait des parties sans nombre,  
Sveltes dans nos costumes blancs.*

*Le soleil se fanait, la brume était légère,  
Nous écoutions en nous murmurer le désir,  
Et nos anciens baisers, de leur chaud souvenir,  
Parfumaient nos cœurs en prière.*

*Nous revenions tous deux par une sombre allée . . .*

*Amour, te souvient-il de cette sombre allée?*

With a coolness which surprised himself Georges quietly folded the sheet and slipped it into his pocket.

Staring at the exercise-book which he was pretending to read, Georges considered what he had just done. It was a kind of instinct which had driven him to take possession of this poem, as it had driven him to open the exercise-book in the first place. But he had not acted with any clear idea of what lay behind his impulse, and only gradually did his unconscious motive become clear to him: he had realised that the poem was such that it could, in accordance with the letter and spirit of the rules, get André expelled. The realisation made him blush: yet the idea seemed to him not without its points; it should not be very hard to justify it.

Before thinking any longer on those lines he wanted to be sure that the theft had not been noticed. The poem must surely be among those which Lucien had promised to let him read. It was possible that Lucien had, in fact, put it where he had found it deliberately. On the other hand he did not seem to have been watching to see what impression it produced. Could it be that he did not even remember that his exercise-book contained so interesting an exercise? With a view to verifying these hypotheses Georges closed the exercise-book ostentatiously and put it back where he had found it. Lucien merely glanced at it indifferently.

Georges was disturbed by the feeling of having someone at his mercy. Despite his hatred he experienced a kind of admiration for André. He would not have thought him capable of writing such poetry and admitted to himself that *he* could certainly not have done so. But the

transparent allusions which figured in the poem soon revived his animosity. Thanks to the weapon which had so unexpectedly come into his hands, he would be able to get rid of his adversary once and for all, for fate had delivered him into his hands. All was fair in love and war. The history of every age provided many examples of such proceedings. Pericles had caused his rival Cimon to be banished by ostracism. Brutus had murdered Caesar. A pope, answering Charles d'Anjou's question as to what fate should be reserved for Conradin, had replied, *Vita Conradini, mors Caroli*. Was not Georges about to obey, even, the law given to a knight at his arming—"Strike thine enemy with both edges"? He would strike with the edge which presented itself. Moreover, he would be striking in the name of morality, in the name of the college, in the name of his schoolfellows. He would even be striking a blow for Lucien, since he had no doubt that his own influence over his friend would be better than André's.

In spite of which reasoning he knew perfectly well that he would be committing what, in the history books, was called an act of treachery which, by the knightly code, was felonious. Outside the college the very idea of such an act would have seemed to him impossible, but inside, among so much falsity of every kind, it seemed to him almost natural.

In the mathematics period Georges again found himself face to face with Father Lauzon. He was rather embarrassed at encountering the man to whom he had confessed his sins, in the guise of a teacher. It was already clear to him that his next confession would be much less thorough. He had been too simple because he was a new boy. But now he considered the masters at St Claude's even more simple than himself, if they really expected sincerity in their penitents. They reminded him of that worthy parish priest who, having decided to

establish a rota for Holy Week confessions, announced from the pulpit that he would take the liars on Monday, the thieves on Tuesday, the indecent on Wednesday—and then was surprised when nobody turned up.

In college, of course, everyone went to confession—but with a very clear idea of what they were about. The boys had their own interpretation of the proverb about the value of a word to the wise.

Georges understood, now, what the taking of sacraments meant to his schoolfellows: it was a means of living in peace if not with their conscience, at least with their masters. Henceforth he would be like Lucien, André and the rest.

The English lesson which followed maths made him acquainted with the only one of his masters he had not yet met. That pedagogue enjoyed great prestige by reason of a residence of twenty years in England. His face was brick red, as is commonly believed to be the case among Englishmen. He talked with his eyes shut and his face tilted towards the ceiling in a kind of trance. His accent, probably very good indeed, provoked outbursts of stifled laughter: he gave the impression of gargling with syllables. Even his way of saying “yes” contained all the weight of his perfect knowledge of English.

That Thursday there was no walk—to make up for the extra one on the first day of term—and Georges was glad. He could even have wished there were no breaks. He was impatient for the evening study period. At tea-time he pressed all the dainties at his disposal on Lucien. At last came the moment when he could write his chit: *G. de Sarre wishes to see M. le Supérieur.*

It was Lucien who, being at the end of the row, handed the chit to the monitor collecting

them. He read it as it passed through his hands and said, "Congratulations!"

Georges explained that his parents had urged him to pay the Superior a visit of courtesy after a few days—he had already told Marc the same thing. His plans were made: he had sealed up the manuscript in an ordinary envelope bearing the college crest, and he would hand it to the Superior, saying he had picked it up off the floor in front of the study door. He felt proud. He, now, was the stronger, the string-puller. He would be manipulating not only André, but also the Superior.

Lucien, good fellow! was discreetly passing him his maths exercise-book. That same day they had, in fact, ratified a treaty of exchange, a treaty in which the maths prep was Lucien's only contribution. It was, he said, not his fault that he was only brilliant in one subject—Georges' weakest.

"In any case," he added, "we're complementary."

"You have," Georges said, "the art of being complementary. You'd make a good lark-pie purveyor, using the famous recipe!" "Meaning you're the horse, and I'm the lark, I suppose?"

To which Georges had replied by humming,

*Alouette,  
Gentille alouette,  
Je te plumerai.*

He was glad to be constituted Lucien's mentor in their school work: it was as if part of André's privileges were already being transferred to him. Meanwhile, on this occasion, it

was he who was under an obligation, which was as it should be. However, he set about copying from Lucien's exercise-book very coolly, in order to prove to himself that he was a boy of character.

A little after six the Supervisor called him out and gave him his chit, countersigned. As he walked away from the master's desk Georges suddenly became conscious of the full weight of his enterprise: he regretted the whole business. He tried thinking of Lucien but it was no good, he cursed the chit in his hand which now held him to his course in spite of himself. How the others would have despised him if they had known what he was doing! For it was not only André, it was the whole community that Georges was putting in peril. Uncovering the secret of a single pupil, he would, in a certain measure, be giving them all away. There was one source of relief: André was not there to see him go: he had left the study-room himself a few minutes before Georges.

Georges crossed the hall and the courtyard and reached the main staircase. The nearer he came to his destination the more clearly did he perceive not only his responsibilities but also the difficulties of his undertaking. Had he really envisaged clearly what was going to happen? What would be the Superior's reaction to the poem when he read it? Was he not likely to suspect Georges of some perfidy or other? If he was a man of honour—for after all he was a gentleman—what would he think of this boy—the son of a marquis—who made such a return for the welcome which had been extended to him? Would not the disgust inspired by André's libertine verse rebound against the delator? The operation was altogether too dangerous. It would be better to give it up and, for the time being, leave things as they were. He would win Lucien's friendship to himself alone in due course, and,

perhaps, without doing anyone any harm.

Georges had reached the ante-room: he recognised the marble table, the armchairs, the bench covered with green velvet. The study door was ajar. He could hear voices: no doubt the Superior's other visitor would be out in a moment. Georges crossed to the chimney-piece to examine the sculpture which adorned it. It represented a youth, prone, wearing a long robe, the face fallen and haggard. He was pressing the Host to his bosom which was pierced by numerous wounds. Above the figure was carved his name—*Tarsicius*.

At that moment Georges recognised the voice of the Superior's visitor and moving over towards the door he caught a glimpse of André Ferron standing in front of the Superior's desk. André again!—once more crossing his path—André there, as if to say, "Always and everywhere I shall be just ahead of you. See on what good terms I am with our Superior! Don't waste your time. Why not spend it, instead, in writing poetry?—but not to Lucien—say to Tarsicius, for instance."

Georges had taken the envelope with the poem in it out of his pocket. He thought of the handkerchief which had been stained with the blood which André had mixed with Lucien's. He stared at the statue of the young martyr who had spilled his blood for the love of God. Why not make *him* an offering of André's sentiments for Lucien? He would slip the paper under the base of the statuette. Clearly, the friendship in question was pleasing in the eyes of Heaven, since it was prospering: St Tarsicius would, no doubt, give it his protection. Angrily, Georges was about to tear the envelope in pieces before thus dedicating it, when André came out of the Superior's study and smiled at him. In a disturbed state of mind Georges knocked at the study door. He went in and, as he closed the door behind him,

realised that the envelope was no longer in his hand. He must have dropped it, but it would be hidden by the table. In any case the ante-room was badly lit and nobody was likely to come into it while he was with the Superior.

The Superior was turning over a thick pile of letters.

“You have come at the right moment,” he said. “One of your schoolfellows has just brought me the evening mail from the Bursary and there is a letter for you. From your parents no doubt. Here it is. I shall not read it.”

He indicated that Georges should sit down facing him, in front of the book-case. Georges made his excuses for troubling the Superior for no other purpose than the honour of calling upon him. He kept his eyes down, not because he was shy but because the original object of his visit was still present to his mind.

The Superior complimented him on his French composition.

“As you see,” he said, smiling, “I take quite as much interest in you as you in me. I shall not tell you your place in form since the results of the week’s work are not given out until Sundays, at luncheon. But I may say that when I have read out the words ‘Third form’ it will not be long before you hear your own name.”

He asked Georges if he had already made any friends. As if to make some sort of reparation to André, Georges boasted of the good terms he was on with Lucien.

“Your feeling is not ill-bestowed,” said the Superior. “Rouvère has excellent natural qualities. He is a very honourable lad. M. le Préfet could not have given you a better neighbour. But if I am not mistaken your other neighbour is Marc de Blajan. I am sure that you will appreciate his qualities. He is our star pupil, and he will like you, too, I am sure.”

He went on to speak of Georges' family and rose to consult the guide to the armorial bearings of their province.

"You have a noble coat," he said, "I hope you will be an honour to it. I see it includes flaming brands. You must be 'of fire for truth, of ice to lies'."

The conversation came round to the subject of the Retreat. The Superior expressed great satisfaction in the fact that Georges' arrival in college coincided with the visit of so fine a preacher.

"We are not always so fortunate," he said, "the choice of a preacher is as difficult as the choice of a friend."

Georges saw his chance to show that he was following the sermons with close attention: he asked who Tarsicius, whose name had not yet figured in the preacher's lists, had been. The Superior appeared delighted.

"Ah, very good," he said, "very good! You have noticed my Tarsicius. It is a miniature, in marble, of the saint's statue by the sculptor Falguiere. The original is in Paris, at the Luxembourg museum. It is an admirable work of art, albeit it has one fault—it presents the martyr as younger than he was. Historically, Tarsicius must have been between twenty and twenty-five years of age when he was stoned to death in Rome, on the Appian Way, because he refused to give up to the heathen the Host he was carrying.

"I may add that I myself only learned this fact concerning his age very recently. I owe the information to the Reverend Father Dominican: I was, indeed, expressing my surprise upon not hearing the name of Tarsicius among those of the boy martyrs he had been quoting, just as you expressed your surprise to me. He replied that he had omitted it on purpose in order, as

he put it, not to accredit an error already only too commonly received. As you see, modesty is a lesson we learn every day. However, this very evening he will be speaking to us of the Holy Eucharist and he will not fail to pay tribute to one who may well be called its martyr. My mistake as to the saint's age was due not only to the sculpture, but to the Martyrology, in which Tarsicius is referred to as an acolyte. It did not occur to me that the very simple functions of an acolyte—you, no doubt, have already filled the office, or will do so here—were formerly almost equivalent to those of a deacon: so that there could be no question of entrusting them to a child.

“Since my statuette of St Tarsicius has captivated you, you will be able, later on, in memory of our college, to enroll yourself in the *Collegium Tarsicii*, a pious youth association founded at the beginning of the century in the Christian capital. It was composed of Romans of good family and they revived the liturgy of the early Church. Their chapel is reminiscent of the catacombs; the celebrant, who wears a circular chasuble, faces the congregation instead of turning his back on it; and he speaks most of the sacred words aloud. The members of the association make the responses all together, they wear the same costume as the acolyte Tarsicius—the immaculately white *vestis talaris*, and they have in their hands a little manual called *Ichthus*, the mystic name of Christ, as you know.

“What a pity, is it not, that we cannot imitate these splendours in our own chapel! I have an idea! I should like to, as it were, reward your intelligent curiosity and bless your budding friendship with Rouvère—it was his mother, as it happens, who gave us our Tarsicius. You shall both serve as my acolytes tomorrow morning: tell him so from me.”

Georges, looking embarrassed, thanked the Superior for the compliment, and took leave

of him: he found the senior school Father-Prefect waiting in the ante-room, obviously impatient at being kept waiting. Unlike André he did not smile, but went straight into the Superior's study.

Anxiously, Georges' eyes sought the dropped envelope: it was neither under the table nor behind the armchairs. Suddenly recalling that the Prefect had been carrying a paper in his hand, Georges went silently back to the study door and glued his ear to the wood.

"Poor young pervert!" the Superior was saying. "He was here not half-an-hour ago. He must have dropped it and thus betrayed himself as he was leaving the room."

Going down the stairs Georges was almost overcome by faintness and clung to the banister. What he had wished for was accomplished and now he would greatly have preferred never to have desired it. The very fact that he had brought it about to some extent despite himself made it seem to him that the consequences must be more serious than he had foreseen. Or rather, he had foreseen nothing whatsoever—nothing, for all he had thought himself so clever. For was it not now perfectly obvious that André would not be the only one stricken, that he would drag Lucien down with him? And was it not probable that Georges' share in the business would easily be uncovered? If André remembered that the poem had been in the exercise-book, Lucien would surely not forget that he had lent the exercise-book to Georges. And Georges' visit to the Superior would give him the clue. Georges would be a third casualty of his own act, and the two friends, before being expelled, would have ample time to denounce him in his turn—but to his schoolfellows. He, too, would be forced to leave the college, driven out by the other boys. He would be made acquainted with a new manifestation of ostracism.

He did not dare return to the study-room and went to the playground in the courtyard. He thought of running away—into the country-side; or he could catch a train home—he would travel without a ticket. He would explain to his parents that he found being at a boarding-school unbearable. Then he pulled himself together: he was being childish. Had not his father called him a man? His great-grandfather had gone to the guillotine during the Revolution; Tarsicius and the preacher's list of young martyrs had been tortured to death. Nobody was going to kill him. He owed it to himself to show no fear of life, especially of life as he himself had made it. He would return, take his place next to Lucien under André's eyes, and wait coolly upon events. He walked back towards the college. In the hall he stopped by a standard lamp and looked at himself in his pocket-mirror. It seemed to him that he was rather pale; he pinched his cheeks.

He had hardly got back to his desk when the door was flung violently open and the Father-Prefect burst into the room. Despite his resolution Georges was almost choking with anguish. Another moment and he would no longer be the only one who knew. The Prefect said a few words to the master on duty, in a low voice, and then curtly, with the air of an officer of justice, called out Ferron. Everyone seemed to be holding their breath and André's footsteps rang hollow as he walked down the room.

Georges, trying to simulate indifference, kept his eyes glued to his book. At last he dared to raise them and saw the Prefect seize André by the arm and thrust him out of the room. With all the truth and sincerity of which his soul was capable he knew he would have given ten years of his life to prevent this frightful outcome of what he had done. He was clinging to his seat as if he were afraid of being carried away; Lucien, as if seeking his protection, had

taken his hand. Both their hands were moist.

The other boys, astounded at this sudden, violent event, were questioning each other as to its meaning, but the master rapped twice on his desk with his ruler and order was restored. Georges could feel the blood rising in his temples. Lucien was prostrate. At last, somewhat late, the bell rang for the sermon, and they rose to go into the junior school study-room. In the senior's room all papers and books had been put away: only André's exercise-book remained open on his desk, a single white mark. As he passed it the master shut it with a contemptuous flick of the fingers and threw it into the desk.

The Superior was not present. The Dominican's voice rang loud and clear but to Georges his words seemed devoid of sense. As on the previous evening Georges had only to make an imperceptible movement to touch Lucien: but there seemed to be an abyss separating them. The motion he had made in this same room yesterday had nothing in common with that which Lucien himself had made in study a few minutes ago.

The Superior came into the room and, having crossed himself, sat down. He looked very grave. Georges shrank behind the boy in front; he did not want the Superior to see him. He execrated the visit he had paid the Superior and did not want to remind him of it.

Presently he managed to attend to what the preacher was saying. The Dominican must have been informed of the incident, for he was dealing with a subject more appropriate to the circumstances than the martyrdom of St Tarsicius. The Eucharist figured in his sermon only as ordeal and chastisement—instances of the Host bursting into flames or sweating blood as it came into contact with sacrilegious lips. Cases of sudden death following wicked communions were quoted. There were sentences concerning sins which degraded

man lower than the beasts, obscene spirits lurking and snarling in the shadows, and guardian angels returning in floods of tears to Heaven. Kindly anecdotes and radiant beautiful children—these were not for this occasion. The hero of the preacher's new repertoire was the man of Balmes who had danced in a circle for twenty-four years after having danced, during the Terror, with a statue taken from a shrine. He had been fed, during this demoniacal *pas seul*, by throwing bits of food into his mouth. When he asked for supreme unction the priest who came to administer the sacrament and absolve him was forced to dance round with him. By way of a call to repentance the orator finished by quoting, consolingly: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow."

During the evening service neither Georges nor Lucien made the response. But Lucien was no longer beside himself: and he stared at the altar, at the enclosure where, the evening before, he had stood, with hypocritical effrontery, beside his friend.

The evening meal was the first at which no *Deo Gratias* was uttered. The boy whose turn it was to read went and fetched the book which the Superior pointed out to him and, at the sound of the bell, began to read. It was *The Life of the virtuous Decalogue, former Student at the University of Paris*. The virtuous Decalogue was, certainly, reassuring after the man of Balmes.

Georges could not have imagined a more lugubrious meal. His eyes often dwelt upon André's vacant place. It was there that the youth had taken his place yesterday evening, after evening service, joyfully, and saying, perhaps, as Lucien had done, "This being a choir-boy is too boring! They won't catch me for that again in a hurry!" And that, indeed, was true, as it happened. As for Georges, he had no more appetite than he had had yesterday; but this

time Lucien had even less.

When the time came for the senior boys to go up to the dormitory the master on duty directed them into the senior study. They found the Superior waiting for them. In a sorrowful voice he said:

“My children, I want to tell you at once of a painful sanction we have had to apply. One of your fellows was no longer in a fit state to remain under this roof. Tomorrow he will be taken home to his parents.

“His crime, perhaps a small one in the word’s eyes, is one of those which cannot be tolerated in our community. Intellectual licentiousness, even though it be no more than a game, and go no farther than an idea, is incompatible both with serious study and with a Christian conscience. The boy we are concerned with has sworn to me that he has never, thank God, made any of you his confidant. But in removing him from your midst I was protecting you; and he himself has confessed to me that he does not feel himself, in fact, fit to be among you.

“Think of him with feeling, as he—shut in the sick-bay to which he has been relegated like the black sheep which is cut out from the flock—as he thinks of you, his former comrades. And reflect that it is to this end that holidays ill-spent in the wrong kind of reading and, possibly, in bad company, can—on his own admission—lead a boy who had, until this time, always been pious and well-disciplined.

“You will know how to profit from this lesson which Divine Providence was reserving for our opening term Retreat, and you will not refuse to pray for him who was chosen as its vehicle.”

Marc was triumphant.

“Didn’t I tell you so?” he said to Georges, as they went upstairs to the dormitory. “The impure always end by coming a cropper.”

Once in bed Georges began to think of his victim, recalling the sick-bay where he had spent the latter part of his first day, and where André was now spending his last night in college. And once again he found himself admiring André. This time it was not for a few lines of verse more or less well-written and which, perhaps, were no better than a plagiarism. Poet or no, André was somebody. He had, in a way, triumphed over the Superior: he had denounced and humiliated himself in order to arouse tenderness in his friend; he had sworn an oath, in order to deceive. He had behaved elegantly: he had saved Lucien by placing the inspirer of his muse in the unknown territory of the holidays. He had saved all of them by maintaining the fiction of their virtue. He had given the impression that he had had no accomplices, that his case was a monstrous exception. At the same time he had been shrewd: had Lucien also been expelled their liaison would have been at an end, for the families of both would have had every right to regard it with suspicion. As it was, the game was not yet up for them.

André could hardly be getting any sleep. What would he be thinking of now? Of the welcome awaiting him at home? Probably he would be able to manage his people all right. Or was he, as the Superior had put it, thinking of them, the other boys who, without exception, looked at his empty place when they came into the dormitory as they had done in study, in the refectory and in chapel?

No, he would be thinking of Lucien, dwelling on the fact that he would probably be

seeing him during the Christmas holidays. Perhaps, also, he was thinking of Georges, whom he had met in the anteroom to the Superior's study. If he knew that his poem had been found there, how did he explain that circumstance to himself? Still, what grounds could he have for accusing Lucien's neighbour, the boy who had so kindly lent him his handkerchief when he had hurt himself? At the most he might tax him with imprudence. And if he was ignorant of the manner in which his verse had come to light, he must be blaming Lucien himself for having lost it.

Nobody had been to clean their teeth before going to bed and long after the master had withdrawn there was still no whispering. Suddenly Georges pricked up his ears: he could hear Lucien crying quietly, secretly. And this grief disturbed him. Should he not try to console this second of his victims? Should he not, in honour and fairness, tell him the truth? But now Lucien was getting out of bed, kneeling on the rug beside it. His crying had stopped: he was praying, with his forehead pressed against the covers; his pyjamas were creased-up and wrinkled. As if nothing could make any more impression on him, he turned slowly when Georges got out of bed and knelt beside him. For some seconds they stayed there, motionless.

Georges put his hand on his friend's shoulder. He had not the courage to denounce himself and said, only:

"The Superior told me to tell you that we are to serve his mass tomorrow morning. It was because I'd spoken to him about you and about the St Tarsicius in the anteroom. He told me your mother had given the statue and so he wanted to give our friendship his blessing."

Georges remembered that he had tried to place the friendship of Lucien and André under

the protection of the same saint. What he was now saying seemed to him as wretchedly ironical as his intentions had been then.

Lucien thought over what Georges had said and then, pushing the hair off his forehead said:

“What you tell me confirms what I’ve been thinking: I’ve been saved from the same disaster as André only by a miracle. I tell you God must be at the bottom of it.”

He tried to see the time by his wrist-watch, turning its face towards the night-light, but it was not bright enough. He shaded the watch with his hand so as to see the luminous figures.

“Ten-thirty-five,” he said, and “from now, from ten-thirty-five on October 6, I’m converted.”



*St Claude's, Sunday evening.  
October 9, 193—.*

*My dearest parents,*

*Thank you for your letter which gave me great pleasure. M. le Supérieur gave it to me during a visit of courtesy which I was paying him. He was kind enough to tell me that he is pleased with the beginning I have made here. I am doing my best: I was first in French composition. You will see my other marks in the fortnightly report which will be sent to you with next Sunday's letter.*

*Something has just happened here which closely concerns me. I had already made a very good friend, one of my neighbours in dormitory and class, Marc de Blajan, top of the fourth here last year. By an extraordinary fatality he was taken ill the day before yesterday—it was very sudden—and it turned out that his condition was serious enough for his parents to come and take him home today. As his health is not very good we are afraid that he will not get better very soon. But we are sending him a letter from all of us, at regular intervals, to help him while away the time. I would willingly have let him have my place in composition—he was second. But at least I have another friend, my other neighbour—Lucien Rouvère. He has very good health and also he is very intelligent.*

*Retreat ends this evening. Our preacher, a Reverend Dominican Father, was very eloquent. We all made good resolutions and wrote them down in a special exercise-book.*

*Dearest Mummy, will you please send me a supply of chocolate as soon as possible, and also some quince jelly and some pomegranates. Also I should like to have a little rug to kneel on in chapel.*

*My dear parents, I think this is quite a long letter and I cannot think of anything else to tell you. With lots of kisses, your loving son,*

*Georges.*

*M . . . , 11 October 193—.*

*My darling boy,*

*Your letter, after your short note written a few days ago, gave us great pleasure and I, in my turn, am writing at greater length.*

*We are delighted to hear that you have already settled into St Claude's. And our sincere congratulations on your brilliant success. I see that you are still the good worker you have, thank God, always been. I am sure you will profit a great deal from the Retreat you have just made and, in general, from life in college, which forms young people's character for them.*

*We are sorry about your friend who has been taken ill, and we wish him quickly better. Your father used to know a Blajan: he was in the army. At all events, I hope you will be happy with your other friend.*

*Did you have the cross of your rosary blessed? You will remember that it was replaced just before you left. And have you enough covers on your bed? But I know that the good Sisters who look after you will not let you want for anything. You must always treat them*

*with affectionate deference.*

*The things you asked for will be sent. I am putting a few rose-petals into my letter—from the last rose on the bush in the tub. It will recall the flowers I used to put in your room, and remind you, with kisses from your father and me, of*

*Your Mama.*

Since André's expulsion Lucien had been wearing three scapularies about his neck. He had shown them to Georges. One was blue, one red and one maroon. Father Lauzon had got them for him, but it was the Dominican who had heard his general confession before he put them on, and had given him advice concerning the completion of his conversion. This, he said, must be at once illuminative and purgative, and he had advised the wearing of scapularies as being both a sign of penitence and a mark of piety.

Some days later a number of holy medals arrived to keep the scapularies company. Lucien wore four of these pinned to his sweater, the rarest being the medal of Notre Dame-des-Ermites, given to him by one of the Fathers. He also had one fixed to his belt—that of Notre Dame-de-la-Ceinture; it had been given to him by a boy who came from the town where the Virgin of that name was to be found. Lucien seemed delighted with this array of safeguards and was perfectly indifferent to the ironical remarks of Georges who no longer had any idea of praying for his friend.

"You can say what you like," he told Georges, "but with these on I feel properly dressed."

"I'm glad to hear it," Georges said, "but don't take off either your scapularies or your

medals when you take a bath on Saturdays—it might be dangerous.”

Really, however, he was all the more fond of Lucien. It gave him pleasure to dwell on the fact that unknown even to Lucien himself he, Georges, was the only one who knew the secret of this change. He had, without any such intention, transformed his friend and set his feet in the steps of the virtuous Decalogue. The result he had obtained was as mortifying as it was surprising; but surely it could not be lasting? Georges accepted it but only as a passing phase. This religiosity would soon be borne away on the wings of Time—as Lucien’s grief had already been borne away. Lucien would soon forget André; Georges was careful never to remind his friend of him, and nobody else ever mentioned him.

After the scapularies and medals Lucien began eagerly to collect sacred pictures, beginning with Georges’ first communion one. He begged them first from the other boys and then even from the masters. His missal and hymn-book were stuffed with them and when there was no more room there he filled a box in his desk with them. Some had lace borders or were cut out into the shape of a cross: a few, on parchment, were illuminated. They represented religious paintings, flowers, cult objects generally. There were even, in the collection, a number of illustrated mourning-cards associated with people whom Lucien had never known. One of these was a smiling photograph of a boy, bearing beneath it the following epigraph: “He passed like a lily, leaving naught but a fragrance.”

But the print which was dearest to Lucien’s heart was that of St Theresa of the Child Jesus and the Holy Face, which bore the following inscription—“I thirst for love” and to which was attached a small piece of fabric “which has touched the person of the servant of God”. It was Lucien’s only relic. Having kept it, for a long time, on top of the others in his

box, he took it out and kept it thereafter in his pocket-book where he could look at it more often and kiss it when he thought Georges was not looking.

Many of his medals and pictures carried apostolic indulgences to be gained by reciting the appropriate prayers before them, and this fact led him into a devotion to indulgences. He brought his mass-book into study-period and busied himself drawing up lists of prayers carrying indulgences. He kept his accounts of these in his notebook, from which he had already torn out the written pages without even re-reading them—the very pages to which, formerly, he had confided very different matters. He had torn these pages into small pieces, chewed and swallowed them, in addition to a number of poems which were scattered among his exercise-books: he never even noticed that there was one missing.

Georges, when Lucien lent him his expurgated notebook to read, could still see the torn edges of the pages which had been ripped out. He stared at them for a moment as if, by a sort of sympathetic magic, they bore in invisible ink the confidences Lucien had destroyed.

Lucien's pious register opened with the following note:

"Union in thought at all masses: three hundred and fifty thousand masses every twenty-four hours, four elevations per second." There followed prayers, reflections, affections, benedictions, submissions, invocations, invitations, adorations, acclamations, aspirations, reparations, supplications, contemplations—all classed in order of indulgences carried—plenary, thirty years and thirty forties, seven years and seven forties, seven years, three hundred days, and so forth, and notes in cases where the indulgences were of special value—circumstances, place, intention, attitude (as whether standing or kneeling). Some could be said at will, others only once a day or even on some specified day.

One page of the notebook carried a list of very large indulgences, but these were noted, rather, by way of encouragement for the future. There was one, notably, for 30,000 years established by Alexander VI, and one of 80,000 years due to Boniface VIII and confirmed by Benedict XI. But this one, alas! could only be gained in Venice, and the other in Padua. Lucien sometimes day-dreamed over these immense figures, taken from a book which had been lent him by one of the Sisters. No doubt he was secretly envying the inhabitants of Venice and Padua and perhaps considering how unjust it was that anyone could acquire such a quantity of indulgences at, as it were, one blow. For example, all St Anthony's fellow countrymen had to do in their case was to say an *Ave Maria* before the Altar of Our Lady in the Augustinian's church; however, Lucien had the consolation of making up his mind to go there especially later on.

And, thank God, it was possible to earn substantial indulgences without travelling so far: on the other hand, this could not be done simply by saying a prayer. The method consisted in joining a Fraternity, an Arch-Fraternity, or any such association for good works with the privilege of distributing special indulgences. Lucien was a member of the Brotherhood of Holy Guardian Angels, a zealot of the Work for the Propagation of the Three Ave Marias, and of the *Œuvre des Campagnes*; he was affiliated to *l'Œuvre des Tabernacles*, *l'Œuvre de la Bonne Mort*, a leader of the Association of the Holy Childhood and a section leader of the Association of the Living Rosary.

Members of the Living Rosary, for example, obtained one hundred days' indulgences per bead of their rosary; but Lucien was already aiming at membership of the parent body, the Brotherhood of the Rosary itself, in which case he would get two thousand and twenty-five

days' indulgences per bead.

The matter of the Association for Love and Reparation to the Sacred Heart of Jesus was more complicated. Indulgences granted to associates varied according to certain rules: the value depended, for example, on whether predetermined formulae were or were not first spoken over the cross, then the first three beads, and thereafter either over the large or the small beads. The same applied to the case of the Work of Our Lord's Holy Wounds, otherwise known as the Work of Mercy.

Other brotherhoods or arch-brotherhoods offered participation in a number of Masses in Perpetuity. Among these were the Brotherhood of the Holy Name of Jesus, of Our Lady of Montligeon, of the Most Holy Heart of Mary, of our Lady of Suffrage, of Our Lady of Lourdes, of Our Lady of Victory, of the Virgin of the Seven Pains of Campo-Cavallo, of the Sacred Heart of Jesus of Castro-Pretorio, of the Holy Sacrament, of the Anguishing Heart, of the Precious Blood, of the Penitence of Montmartre, of St Anne d'Auray, of St Michael, of the Angelical Militia, and of the Perpetual Cult of St Joseph. Lucien was soon forced to admit that he was getting rather lost in all these brotherhoods, and he concentrated his main efforts on the Brotherhood of the Holy Name of Jesus, that being the first he had joined.

He took to distributing not only the prospectuses of these societies but also propaganda leaflets entitled "All for Jesus"; "Come to Him"; "Who is Mary?"; "Come to Joseph"; "Heaven Open" and so forth. He also tried to spread the cult of St Expedite, called the patron saint of schoolboys because (said a note) this saint "helps them to expedite their tasks".

He also appointed himself recruiting officer for a number of charitable works, among

others “The Crust of Bread of the Little Clerks of the Immaculate One” which set forth its offerings as follows:

*One Crust of Bread, i.e. ten francs in honour of St Anthony or of St Theresa of the Child Jesus.*

*Three Crusts of Bread, i.e. thirty francs in honour of the Holy Family (Jesus—Mary—Joseph).*

*Twelve Crusts of Bread, i.e. a gift of one hundred francs in honour of the Twelve Apostles.*

Finally Lucien would receive orders for chaplets, since he was the representative of a body called “The Chaplet of Children”. He offered “Chaplets with ordinary chains”, “Chaplets with extra-strong chains” and a range of bead varieties—*cocotine—near-coco*, and even *real coco*.

Georges’ more or less good-natured jokes did not put Lucien off; Georges he saw as his first convert. And how could Georges refuse his’ support when to yield it would mean extra indulgences for the evangelist? Besides, the subscriptions required of him were not very onerous: a franc, one franc fifty, in one case only five centimes. The most expensive item was the “Crust of Bread”: Georges got the Bursar to advance him thirty francs for the Holy Family.

He had given way only in the case of such Works as were more or less remote. This

reminded him of the “Maritime and Colonial League”, which he had been persuaded to join at *lycée*, despite the fact that he had no intention whatever of making long sea-voyages nor of living in the colonies; for he was subject to seasickness and he was afraid of snakes.

Thus the adherences into which he had let Lucien persuade him were platonic; and he was determined that it would be a long time before they caught him for the organisation which actually existed in the college itself: the Congregation.

Father Lauzon had asked him, after confession, whether he would not be touched by the honour of being a Child of Mary; but he had replied that in his opinion this must call for a long spiritual preparation. With Lucien, who also raised the point with him, he was more candid, and passed on to him Marc de Blajan’s opinion. In point of fact he was glad to be holding Lucien in check at one point, and thus to be giving himself more elbow-room with his friend.

One day he told Lucien that he was in the midst of a grave moral crisis, that he had serious doubts in the matter of religion, and that this, no doubt, was due to the works of Anatole France which he had never sufficiently discussed with him. His doubts had been maturing and had now suddenly come to a head—time having attenuated the effects of the Retreat. And pretending to be seeking enlightenment, he put Lucien’s faith to the test by explaining, as best he could during the course of a walk, the reasons for doubting. Lucien listened calmly and confined his comment to “Don’t be an ass!”

In vain did Georges erect arguments and demonstrations of the highest intelligence. Lucien stopped his ears. And that evening he passed Georges his notebook in which he had written the following: “Pray a lot for Georges’ conversion.”

It was a bit too much. Almost enough to make him announce his conversion indeed. And after all, why not, it might not be a bad idea. Georges would be converted because of Lucien as Lucien had been converted because of André—only with different intentions, as in the case of indulgences. Together they would weep, kneeling on the bedside mat, and say their prayers side by side, in pyjamas. They would establish one of those holy friendships worthy of SS Placidius and Maur. They would compose a miniature *Collegium Tarsicii* and would frequently serve mass for the Superior. Lucien would be flattered by this, and would become fonder than ever of Georges. And this might well have interesting consequences; for much can happen beneath the cloak of virtue. Nevertheless, all things considered, Georges did not much care for the role of Tartufe; it was bad enough to have deceived Lucien once already. It would be better to win his heart in some other way.



On the evening of the November monthly holiday, when parents came to take their sons out, Georges told Lucien:

“My mother told me today that a cousin of mine—she’s very pretty, very fair, and is called Liliane—will be spending the Christmas holidays with us. You’re exactly her type, she’ll be crazy about you. Why not come and spend Christmas with us too? You’ll be very welcome—we have several guest-rooms.” “Thanks very much, my dear Georges,” Lucien said, “you’re really kind. But this year I want to spend Christmas very seriously with my family.” To which he added, smiling, “You’re wasting your time, you know.”

Three days later Lucien found in his desk a handsome new notebook in a red leather binding and with gilt edges. Georges had written on the first page, under the date November 6, *To Lucien, for his birthday. Georges.* Lucien smiled at his friend and said thank you, squeezing his hand under the desk. He took up the notebook and read, on the second page, the following lines:

*Mon Bien-Aimé, je t’ai cherché depuis l’aurore  
Sans te trouver, et je te trouve, et c’est le soir;  
Mais quel bonheur! Il ne fait pas tout à fait noir:  
Mes yeux encore  
Pourront te voir.*

*Ton nom répand toutes les huiles principales,  
Ton souffle unit tous les parfums essentiels,  
Tes moindres mots sont composés de tous les miels  
Et tes yeux pâles  
De tous les ciels.*

*Mon cœur se fond comme un fruit tendre  
et sans écorce.  
Oh! sur ce cœur, mon bien-aimé, qui te cherchait!  
Viens te poser, avec douceur comme un sachet,  
Puis avec force  
Comme un cachet.*

Georges had first seen this poem a few days ago, in a magazine his mother had brought with her. True, when copying it into the notebook he had bought for Lucien he had recalled the misfortune which had overwhelmed André as a result of a poem of this kind; on the other hand he knew that he need fear no betrayal. And although he had not, in the end, dared to sign these verses, he hoped that Lucien would think he had written them, for he would have been glad, by this master-stroke, to overthrow André's literary prestige. After all, he was top in French and might well be a poet on occasion.

Lucien asked him, "Who wrote this?"

Georges was forced to admit that the poet was Edmond Rostand.

“I suppose,” Lucien said, “it’s meant to be a woman talking.”

“Make it the *Woman of Samaria*, if you like,” said Georges bitterly, “unless you prefer to think it’s from the *Imitation*”

He had entirely failed in his effort. His poem would be no more effective than his cousin. Lucien, in respect to this *Bien-Aimé*, was using the same kind of irony as Georges used against Lucien’s piety. But Georges no more let himself be put off than did Lucien.

He began by quoting some lines of Rostand’s stanzas in the course of their dormitory conversations and then asked Lucien to repeat them. Lucien did so, but adopted a derisive manner. But it gave Georges pleasure to hear these words spoken by Lucien. And he even resigned himself to accepting the note of derision and making the whole thing a joke in order to keep up the same kind of language between them. Thus Lucien’s exercise-books, notes, meals and bed became those of the *Bien-Aimé*, and “cachet” and “sachet” became passwords.

One of Georges’ pleasantest hours was, henceforth, that of the piano lesson. He had suggested to the elderly maiden lady who came every week to give these lessons, that he and Lucien, being about equal in skill, might play duets.

“My mother,” he said, “is very fond of a thing by Chopin called *Variation brillante sur le rondeau favori: Je vends des scapulaires*. If it wasn’t so difficult it would be exactly the thing for us, even though you’ve only been selling me indulgences.”

To which Lucien replied, “As far as *Variations brillantes* are concerned, I fancy you have enough and to spare. But just bear in mind that I’m not buying.”

They had, as an exception, received permission to practise together during the afternoons. From time to time the silhouette of the Father-Prefect appeared beyond the glass door. But what did that matter? Georges was still alone with Lucien and their heads touched as they leaned forward to read the music, their knees when they both reached a foot for the same pedal. And Georges could sometimes take Lucien's hands and chafe them, on the pretext of warming them.

At the beginning of December Lucien had got chilblains on his fingers. As they prevented him from sleeping he was given permission to go to the sick-bay after dinner and there bathe his hands in an infusion of tanin. One night, Georges being already in bed, he saw Lucien returning from this treatment, walking on tip-toe. He watched him undress and saw that he now did so in a very modest way. The following morning Georges wet his hands at the tap in the courtyard and was careful not to dry them. By the evening he, too, had chilblains, and he fostered them so effectively that, a few days later, they might be regarded as positively alarming. Others in the same case received treatment during the tea-break. But Georges had not been mistaken in thinking that he would receive the same favour as Lucien. The sick-bay Sister was as obliging as the music teacher. So that an evening came when they had their first visit to the sick-bay together. The indicator announced, "The sick-bay Sister is—*Here*."

Water was heating on a gas-ring and two basins were ready. The Sister gave Lucien a note she had promised him, concerning St Brigitte's indulgences. And she asked after Georges' parents.

"You'll be better before Christmas," she told him, "you mustn't appear at home with nasty swollen fingers. Boys from St Claude's ought to return to their families not only more pious

and better informed, but in good health down to their very fingertips.”

Georges presently found himself standing at the window whence, on the first day of term, he had seen André playing with Lucien. He thought of the fact that André had slept in one of these beds, the night before he was expelled. These memories disturbed him. He had expected more pleasure from this little evening party.

The two friends returned to the dormitory by silent corridors. At last Georges said, “What are you thinking about?”

Lucien did not answer at once, but, as he opened the dormitory door, he said, “I’m thinking about André.”

Georges had not once heard that name spoken by Lucien since the memorable night of October 6th. Now, suddenly, the vanished shade was back between them. But what, Georges wondered, followed from this in Lucien’s mind? Might not his old enemy become an unexpected ally? As soon as they were in bed and conversation could be resumed Georges said:

“I thought that André had been banished, in view of your purification programme. Didn’t I see you—not bum, but chew and swallow your notes and his poems? But perhaps you’re only a whited sepulchre?”

“I’ve never stopped thinking of André,” Lucien said, “nor praying for him as much as for someone well-known to you.” “Thanks very much,” Georges said.

Lucien added, “It was in the sick-bay we first met—and we both had chilblains.”

André, remote, was still master: and all Georges’ ruses were second-hand. But could Lucien love both André and God? If he found that contradiction bearable, if past and present

were leagued in his mind, Georges might just as well give up the struggle.

“Is it gratitude or self-mortification which makes you think so often of your times with André?”

“You don’t understand the kind of friend he was to me.” “Don’t I? You’ve made it clear enough!”

“Perhaps. But I’ve an idea that the part you remember is just the very part I’ve forgotten, and it’s because I *have* forgotten it that I can still think of André.”

“Why don’t you simply admit that you’re still crazy about him and think of nothing else? And chuck all this nonsense of holy pictures and scapularies?”

“There’s really nothing to get so angry about! You know perfectly well that there’s a blood-pact between him and me. Besides, according to his horoscope, which I got my uncle to draw, he and I both have three planets in what they call the House of Friends. And another thing, we were both born under the sign of Air—there are four signs, Air, Fire, Earth and Water; that proves that André and I were made to be friends.”

“You believe rather too much in horoscopes. Shall I tell you something? I don’t think your conversion is worth a damn! You haven’t rid yourself of the former man, my dear Lucien. Know what André means in Greek? It means *the* man.

“You’d do better to take an interest in my cousin. It’s you and she who were made for each other, though I do suspect her of having been bom under the sign of Fire. You ought to be complementary—since air fans fire, you know.”

“My fires are all extinct.”

“I forgot that your moon is in Ten—like Joan of Arc.”

“You make fun of the terms but you don’t know what they mean: the moon in Ten is a sign of popularity.”

“Really? I thought it was a sign of virginity.”

“Why not confine yourself to watching over your cousin’s?” Making a last effort Georges suddenly changed his tactics. “That’s an idea! Suppose we were to pray for her? I’ll ask her for two photographs, and we’ll keep them in our mass-books, the way Blajan did.”

Lucien appeared to be very indignant at this suggestion. “Really, Georges,” he said. “How can you suggest such a thing! Especially today—when it’s the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.”

The interest which Georges took in Lucien had in no way disturbed his work. On the contrary, in order to console himself for his disappointments in matters of sentiment, he worked in such style as to be, as often as possible, top of his form. For October and November he had had the highest monthly marks, which were read out in study by the Superior. He was sure of the same triumph in the December results, which would be announced in a few days, before breaking up for the holidays. His name had appeared each time in the table of honour, with the remark *Excellent*. Thus Blajan’s departure—for Blajan, whose quality he had hardly had time to test, was said to be very clever—had yielded him more advantage than André’s. Because of it Georges reigned unchallenged over French, English, History, Greek and Latin. The rest he left to the others.

In maths he had help from Lucien, but self-respect drove him to try palliating this fraud, at least in his own eyes. Lucien provided the solutions or exact proofs, and then Georges

used his ingenuity in working them out again, in his own fashion, a method which earned him such comments as “Over refined”, “Strained”, “Far-fetched”, and “Don’t beat about the bush” in his maths exercise-book.

On the other hand he had no need of Lucien’s sacred zeal in order to shine, on Sunday mornings, during the religious instruction classes. It was like having a kind of bet on with himself: he answered questions according to the book, but took a secret pride in knowing that there were other answers he might have given; he kept them to himself. He had come first in religious composition for the whole term and had bet Lucien that, all unworthy as he was, he would get the prize.

Of all the term’s classes in religious instruction there was one which would be remembered. The lesson began, as usual, with a prayer addressed to the Sacred Heart: the old history master, who also took them for religious instruction, had put the class under the protection of the Sacred Heart. Then, as the subject was the tree of the Cross, the Father was led to say something of the tree of knowledge of good and evil which had been, he said, the prefiguration, in Eden, of the tree of the Cross since seduction had come from it, while redemption had come from the other.

Whatever the Father told them, or whatever question might be asked of him, it was the rule that there must never be any laughter.

A boy asked whether it was known what sort of tree the tree-of-the-knowledge-of-good-and-evil was. The good Father removed his glasses, rubbed his eyes and replied calmly:

“That’s an interesting point. I overlooked it during the lesson about the earthly paradise and I’m glad of the chance to come back to it. Here, then, is how the matter stands:

“Most people consider the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to have been an apple-tree, because it is written, in *The Song of Songs*, which you are not allowed to read, ‘I awoke thee beneath an apple-tree.’ Others believe it to have been a fig-tree since immediately after having eaten the forbidden fruit Adam and Eve put on fig-leaves. Still others favour the orange-tree or the vine.

“According to the inhabitants of Madeira the tree which brought about the downfall of our first forebears was the banana-palm, or at least one of its main varieties commonly known as the ‘large-fruited’ banana-tree. This rather singular opinion appears to have been in the minds of certain botanists when they called some species of the banana-plant ‘Banana-tree of Paradise’, or again ‘Adam’s tree’. And, in Latin, *Musa paradisiaca*—bananas belonging to the genus *musa*.

“What is more, according to certain peoples the fruit of this plant has the sign of Christ’s law at its centre: and if you examine a section after cutting it you will, indeed, notice a kind of cross. It is for this reason that, in Spain and Portugal, many people are said to regard cutting a banana with a knife as sacrilege.”

Georges had very soon exhausted the resources of his class library. Most of the novels which it contained were such that he did not get beyond the author’s name. The only book on the shelves which really interested him was the *Manual of the Index*, which had enabled him to collect a list of other titles. Nor was he by any means the only one to make this use of it—no book was in greater demand just before the holidays.

Rather than addle his brains with the pious clap-trap which encumbered the library,

Georges preferred borrowing serious books—books on antiquity, the arts, etc—from the masters. A fairly complete *Mythologie* had, in' particular, greatly interested him. The Superior had agreed to lend him the book, but not without first explaining how he was to make good use of it.

“These fables,” he said, “should be read as instruction, not as entertainment. There are certain tales and pictures which you will pass over. Never forget that you are constantly under the eyes of your guardian angel.”

Which had reminded Georges that he was a member of the Brotherhood of Guardian Angels. And, every time he came to one of the stories or pictures in question, he had hastened to show it to Lucien, who was under the aegis of the same body.

The *Mythologie* produced, moreover, another effect which the Superior had not guessed at either: Georges began to make a cult of the ancient gods, writing the names of several among them on the first page of his books. He was sorry that he could not very well write them at the head of his school exercises instead of the statutory *Jesus—Mary—Joseph*. He amused himself invoking their aid, and in default of any other results, attributed his scholastic successes to their intervention.

Although he resisted the advances of the Congregation, he was still tempted by the Academy. He had thought it would be easy to accumulate the five French compositions marked not less than sixteen out of twenty which were necessary as a basis for candidature. *Le Tatou*, however, was severe, and, as Georges knew, his colleagues not less so. Indeed, the Academy being free to elect its members, the masters were strict in their treatment of the ambitious, to avoid the risk of having their judgment repudiated by it. The Superior never

interfered; he was, no doubt, glad to have the prestige of the body over which he presided thus maintained. His only privilege was a power of veto such as the King had wielded in the case of the *Académie Française*.

Georges, then, was looking over his compositions for the term. He owed his lowest mark—on a subject entitled “Portrait of a friend”, to his neighbour. He had taken Lucien as a model and had described him with a lyricism which was, certainly, excessive. The word-portrait ended with the following: “Such, then, would be the friend of my heart.” In regard to which the French master had written, “Your heart does not set a high standard.” The mark, eight out of twenty, was accompanied by a comment: “Bad taste. Want of idealism. You might have sought a better inspiration.” And Lucien had made matters worse when Georges showed him the work by saying, “Were you trying to make a fool of me?” Fortunately *le Tatou* had not recognised Georges’ hero; nor had he regaled the class by reading the essay aloud, as he sometimes did when the work was bad enough. Had he done so his listeners would have been more perspicacious.

Happily, Georges did not have to rely on that particular piece. Having set aside those which were only average, Georges looked over those which would probably earn him the title of Academician. He began by glancing through the first composition of the year which had enabled him so promptly to displace Marc de Blajan: “A tourney under François I”. The J—M—J and cross, which he had left out, had been written in by the master, and the comment “Excellent work. Plenty of movement, colour, and terms well chosen (two anachronisms).” The anachronisms in question had slipped into the description of the tribune of honour: Georges had filled it with ladies wearing “hennins” (the master had written “Too

late"). And about the King's person Georges had set not only jesters, but also *mignons* ("Too early").

The theme of the second essay was "A log's lament"—a log of wood mourning for its forest. Georges had received the highest marks for that one also. The only criticism was of a passage in which he had described "joyful young couples wandering together in the shade of mighty oaks." ("Rather too daring, from your pen", *le Tatou* had written.) The third composition was entitled "Our National Emblems" (*le Tatou* had written, "You have written well on the subject of the cock, but have done less well for the lark"—"gentille alouette" had made another appearance). Next came an essay on Vauvenargue's "Our surest protectors are our talents". Georges had amused himself by taking "talents" in the sense of "money". (Comment: "A bold paradox wittily handled.") All this, however, only added up to four essays for presentation to the illustrious lords of the Academy. He would have to produce something adequate at the beginning of the next term.

Georges hoped to be a member of St Claude's Academy, but he was not losing sight of the *Académie Française*. The fact that the first had never led anyone to membership of the second put him on his mettle. The college did, indeed, boast two old boys who were members of the *Institut* and who had distinguished themselves in, respectively, political economy and natural history. But these, with a cabinet minister, a bishop and three generals, were the sum total of its great men. Georges made up his mind to give this roll of honour the crown of prestige which was wanting, the only one which counted, by becoming a great writer and a member of the *Académie Française*. In his moments of exaltation he could see himself seated, beneath the Dome, in the place of Anatole France, the author whose cloak he

hoped to inherit. However, he kept all this very much to himself, and when Lucien, who wanted to be a planter, asked him what he was going to be when he grew up Georges had replied, "A marquis, if I can."

At *lycée* he had once proudly confided his literary ambition to a school friend, who had advised him to write not grammar but detective stories. On that day Georges had sworn never again to tell anyone of his ambition until he was of age.

Apart from his classical labours his only work to date was a list: a list of all the authors who had the same initials as himself.

It began with Sophocles and included such notable names as Suetonius, Shakespeare, Schiller and Eugene Sue. Georges de Scudery offered an even closer identity since he had the same Christian name and the *particule*, to which he added the title of Academician; and the Marquis de Segur offered Georges identity of title.

On the eve of breaking up for the holidays there was a traditional ceremony at evening chapel: the blessing of the lamb.

One of the choir-boys was the cynosure of all eyes. He was carrying in his arms, like an offering, the new-born lamb to be consecrated in the name of all the boys which, it was said, the masters ate on the following day.

The choir sang a canticle whose refrain was taken up by everyone, and the little creature struggled in the boy's arms. The red colour of the liturgical ornaments (it was the feast of St Thomas the Apostle) was not likely to reassure it.

*O Jesus, my sweet Saviour,*

*I come to offer you my heart  
Like this lamb  
So white and fine,  
Like this lamb.*

The chapel master had, that evening, rearranged the places in the senior division in order that the voices should be more harmoniously grouped next term: Georges and Lucien, singing *alto*, were moved to the front bench. Georges might almost have been accused of having changed his place in order to get a better view, so steadily did he contemplate the boy who had charge of the lamb.

This was a boy of remarkable beauty, about thirteen years of age. The regular features of his face were crowned by a head of fair, wild curls, and lit by a brilliant smile. Like the mystical lamb in Father Lauzon's room, he seemed to be offering himself to be adored. His bare knees appeared beneath the hem of his short red gown.

It was not, of course, the first time Georges had noticed him, sitting on the opposite side of the choir in the front row of the junior school. He had, in fact, noticed him early in the term, when serving mass with Lucien—the mass which was to place his friendship with Lucien under the protection of St Tarsicius. Standing next to the Superior, who was administering communion, Georges was holding the tray, and among all the faces which passed before him, illuminated by the reflection from its golden mirror surface, he had been struck by that one in particular. But thereafter he had only seen the younger boy from a distance, either in chapel or in refectory. He had always admired him, but as someone

inaccessible, and had never given him much thought, being wholly absorbed by Lucien. Now, however, it suddenly seemed to him that this boy and himself were destined to know each other and that they had suddenly been united, indeed, already, by a hidden bond. The fact that they had been brought so close together now, and would, in future, face each other without intervening obstacle, seemed to him a good omen.

He asked Lucien who the boy was, for he did not even know his name: he was, it seemed, the brother of their friend Maurice Motier, and was in the fifth form.

Never had Georges gone to mass with as much pleasure as on the following morning. Facing him sat he who would henceforth be the ornament of all his days at St Claude's—since every day would begin with a sight of him. Secrecy would be an added charm. Georges had, in fact, decided to say nothing about this to Lucien. For, he wondered, was Lucien capable—whether by the light of the Holy Childhood or the light of his friendship with Andr —of understanding an adoration which was at once passionate and platonic?

Georges, that day, had reason to bless the college custom of having seniors and juniors take communion together, bench after bench, so as to unite them in a common act of worship. He rose feeling disturbed, moved. The other had for a moment the appearance of coming deliberately to meet him. They were separated only by Lucien.

At the station that afternoon Georges used a great deal of strategy in trying to get Lucien to choose the same carriage as the other boy, but there was no room in it when he succeeded. Then, suddenly shy, he would not so much as go out into the corridor. Although his pockets were full of the *tableaux d'honneur* he had won for the term's work, the very sight of the

other would have intimidated him, and he even felt intimidated by the fact that he was travelling third-class. First he had sought the other boy; now he as sedulously avoided him. At the idea of being near to him, and at liberty, he had lost his nerve. However, when the train stopped at S., where, as he knew, the Motiers lived, he managed to look out of the window. The boy was walking down the platform between Maurice and Father Lauzon; he was laughing.

Georges had a feeling of happy surprise at finding himself in his own home once again. He resumed possession of an environment which was his own but which, from a distance, had become strange to him. It was pleasant to be restored to his birthright, to be, once again, the son of the house. He was no longer *Sarcophagus* or *Sardine*—nicknames abusing his own which were sometimes used at college; he was Georges de Sarre. A new servant, in fact, had actually just addressed him as *Monsieur le comte*. Never before, in his whole life, had he been thus given his title. No doubt it was because he had grown.

Before dinner he made a round of inspection. He carried the Persian cat in his arms; white, like an enormous pom-pom, and with a tail like a white fox, the animal had winked at him when it saw him, thus deigning to recognise him. Carrying the cat, Georges thought of young Motier carrying the lamb.

He was glad to see his own room again: a room to himself at last! He felt free not to have any regrets for the dormitory.

He sat down and played a scale on his piano: a small piano for a little prince; the keyboard would not have accommodated both his bands and Lucien's.

Above his father's office was his beloved library: half the lowest shelf was occupied by the Holy Bible in Menochius' edition, fifteen volumes bound in red morocco leather. Above

this solid foundation were stacked dictionaries, poetry, novels and history. Beside them was another glass-fronted case containing the antique books stamped with the Sarre arms, but nobody ever opened them. Georges sank into a leather easy-chair, a chair which was comfortable, into which one could let oneself collapse with every confidence. To the devil with the kind of chairs you had to treat with respect, like those in the drawing-room!

Still, in the latter room Georges was quite moved by the softness of the light which filtered through the curtains. The little people in the pattern of the silk tapestry still played on their flutes, to welcome him. He was amused by the pictures. The picture of St John the Baptist as a child showed one saint with raised, admonishing finger: he seemed to be saying, "Aren't I a fine fellow?" And there was the dowager playing with her pet monkey; and the page—looking, as always, very *hors de page*. The fine coins in the medal cabinet seemed ready to resume the pristine sharpness of their minting, just for his sake.

Georges' eyes, purified by the austerities of St Claude's, rediscovered the splendour of Persian carpets. He admired the variety of their small patterns, the harmony of their colours, the fine closeness of their pile. He put the cat down upon one of them which was like a dropped and scattered bouquet, so that he could watch the animal walk away from him among the flowers of its native land.

In the dining-room he indulged his taste for splendour by switching on the two great silver lamps. There were grape-fruits in the fruit-basket: his tastes had not been forgotten. It was a pity that this fruit could not conveniently be among one's extra provisions at college: it called for too much paraphernalia—what with castor-sugar, Kirsch and crushed ice. Georges thought that he had forgotten all these things, and he was by no means displeased to

see them again.

He paid a visit to the kitchen, where he was informed that, in his honour, dinner would include a *soufflé*. Then he walked once or twice the length of the terrace and went down into the garden to inspect the hot-house.

In the garage he found his bicycle hanging on a stand. He preferred it to his parents' motor-car. He took it down, pumped up the tyres, and rang the bell as a sign that here was another thing which was once more his own—liberty. His mind dwelt upon long excursions, alone with the wind of his passage. It was a pity that S. lay beyond his range: he would have liked to go there in that fashion.

During the next few days he ran into several former *lycée* acquaintances. They struck him as even more devoid of interest than ever, some with their mania for the cinema, others with their smut, and the sporting types with their eternal talk of games. His own particular sporting pastime was barred to him; bad weather prevented him taking out his bicycle.

He wrote Lucien a long letter, telling him that the celebrated Liliane was not coming after all; consequently Lucien himself could come, his virtue would be running no risks. On the other hand his life might be in some danger: one of Georges' Christmas presents was a superb pair of foils, he had taken his first lesson in fencing, and was already prepared to challenge Lucien to a bout, even with buttons off and no masks if he felt like it. Georges also told Lucien that he had now read *Thaïs* and *The Song of Songs*, and concluded by asking him if his chilblains were better. By return he received a letter from Lucien:

*December 27th, 193—*

*Dear Georges,*

*Very many thanks for having been the first to write and for repeating your kind invitation. Unfortunately our holidays are too short for me to come to you. In fact I only just have time to write: I am rather pushed for time as I am paying a series of visits to church creches (you earn indulgences by it). We had a lovely midnight mass here. A girl, perhaps as pretty as your cousin, sang solo.*

*I am glad you had foils for Christmas—but be careful not to poke your own eye out—I had a green bicycle. It is not a famous make, like yours, sir! but it's not bad. It's got three-speed gears, a chromium-plated luggage-carrier, and a two-note bell (ding-dong).*

*As you told me what you are reading, I will do likewise: I am reading "The A miable Jesus, translated from the Spanish". It is very interesting.*

*I am sending you a picture which I found. As you will see it has a prayer to "the guardian angel of an absent child". I am saying it for you now—I know it by heart. Say it for me. In spite of all my efforts I have more need of it than you would think.*

*Here is why: my uncle, the astrologer, claims that he can find no indication of what he calls mysticism in my horoscope. He says that Uranus and Mars are conjoint in it, which presages very different things but he will not tell me what. This idea is very irritating and I am only telling you because you think the same. It is silly to try to believe everything . . .*

Lucien added, in a postscript, that he had joined the Maritime and Colonial League, as some preparation for his career as a planter.

The picture he sent Georges showed a blue angel hovering over a pink child. The prayer

was printed on the back:

*Guardian angel of him whose name you can read in my heart, watch over him with every care, make his way easy and his labours fruitful. Dry his tears if he weeps; sanctify his joys, if he have any; raise his courage if he feel himself weakening; restore his hope if he be discouraged, his health if he be sick, truth if he err, repentance if he fall. (Forty days' indulgence.)*

Georges was still Lucien's friend but he felt himself daily growing in friendship towards another, one whom he hardly knew and who did not know him at all. He often thought of the younger Motier. As if to make himself manifest to the other, he wanted to make some impact on the people and places about the boy.

He had written to Blajan, who was still at S., for the correct addresses of Maurice Motier and of Father Lauzon. He liked to recall the fact that the name of that town had figured in their first conversation at college. Marc, in answering his letter, showed himself grateful for being remembered: a personal letter was much nicer than the collective letter which consisted only of a couple of lines countersigned by the whole class. Marc seemed fated to be duped by Georges' intentions: had he not believed that it was he who had influenced Georges in his choice of Father Lauzon as his confessor? Whereas, of course, it was Lucien's influence which had counted.

Provided with the addresses, Georges hastened to send New Year greetings to the Father and to Maurice. For the first time he wrote the name *Motier*. Maurice would, no doubt, be

surprised to receive his missive, for they were not on very close terms. So, perhaps, would the Reverend Father, since the new term was so near. Georges was sorry that time was, in fact, so short that Maurice did not reply. He would have been interested in a letter from Maurice; and perhaps his younger brother would have read it, as he might well read the one Georges had sent.

On New Year's Day Georges saw, in the window of a stationer's shop, an exhibition of pious pictures. He stopped short; it had occurred to him that he might make Lucien some return for his gift. But it was not so easy, Lucien was copiously furnished with such goods: his books and boxes contained the whole regiment of saints and angels. The ones in the shop, if they differed in details, were still the same as those he already possessed. What Georges wanted was something original: some rare angel, like those cited by the Parnassian poets, some Blessed of recent date, or one of those unfamiliar saints who never appear outside the pages of the *Martyrology*.

Photographs of museum pieces, thrust aside by the display of edifying pictures, occupied a corner of the window. One of them, depicting the bust of a young god, caught Georges' eye and held his attention. The charming head, with deeply thoughtful eyes, was tilted slightly towards one shoulder; locks of long, curling hair fell on the other. He went in and bought it. On the back it bore these words, "The Cupid of Thespis, Vatican Museum." Georges took the coincidence of these terms for a sign: a radiant friendship awaited him at St Claude's, like this Love, staking ancient paganism's claim in the very halls of Christ's Vicar. He decided to keep the picture for himself and put it away in his wallet. It would be his token for the new year; he would keep the guardian angel with it, as a memento.

Tuesday, January 3. First day of term. Because of the snow it would not have been pleasant to return to college by car, and Georges went by train, so that this time it was he who departed and his parents who remained behind.

Lucien, coming from farther down the line, had kept a seat for him. His face was radiant. He was impatient to get Georges out into the corridor where he could tell him his news: André had written to him; his letter had arrived yesterday.

“It’s astounding,” he said. “The very last day! I was completely changed in a moment—unconverted as suddenly as I was converted! It was funny. As I read his letter it was as if I could feel medals and scapularies falling off and falling down inside my clothes. Indulgences, rosaries, guardian angels, “Amiable Jesus”, the lot—all liquidated! You and my uncle were right.”

“Watch out! It’ll be my turn to convert you!”

“I don’t think much credit accrues to either of us so far as conversions are concerned.”

Lucien could not resist the temptation of showing Georges the miraculous letter, which he had brought with him. He said, “You never read any of André’s poetry, but this is a sample of his prose.”

*My dear Lucien,*

*I think you will be glad to have news of me at last, together with my best wishes for the New Year. You would have heard from me before, but I arrived home for the holidays with ‘flu. I did not want to write to you until I was better. Our friendship must know*

*nothing but what is beautiful and pleasant. I say "our friendship" because I am certain that our absurd separation has changed nothing. Besides, what changes can we make in the stars? And we are bound by them for always.*

*You must let me scold you, to begin with, for having got me expelled and then for not writing to me. I am much more concerned with your silence, than your carelessness, since, of course, you did not deliberately lose the poem which caused all the trouble.*

*Do you remember the verses which I copied out for you—and revised somewhat in the process—from a book by an author who got himself rather a bad name early in the century, Fersen? Perhaps you did not even know how much those verses meant to me. I was foolish enough to write my name under the poem, but fortunately I did not put yours into the dedication—which was what saved you.*

*You would have been amused at my discussion with the Superior on the subject of Baron Fersen, whose existence, despite my assurances, he persisted in denying, being determined to make me admit that the poem was my own work. In order to confound me he even consulted all his reference books, which, unfortunately, dealt with all the Fersens in creation excepting the one in question.*

*In any case, author or copyist, I was done for. There was nothing left for me to do but play the classical repentance scene, passing by careful gradations from attrition to contrition, with a provision of tears of compunction to wash it all down.*

*The fact was, I had to be careful to avoid being too much blackened in the eyes of my people. As a result I was accepted into the lycée at—without difficulty, as a boarder. Such is the price of being attached to anyone if you are under the care of the good Fathers. If*

*you ask me they are jealous: the old story of the fox who had his tail cut off.*

*I often think of the next long vacation. I am hoping, of course, that your family, like mine, will be going to—again. I often think, too, of last summer, that marvellous summer, the mere thought of which warms my heart even in your absence. I seem to live that night under the stars all over again, when we fell asleep by moonlight like two Endymions. Or, to be more precise, you slept and I watched you—a picture capable of inspiring M. de Fersen himself.*

*But rather than make poems of them, let us keep all these memories in our heart of hearts. There, nobody can lay hands on them. There, nobody can prevent André from being with Lucien, nor from kissing him, as he used to do . . .*

Georges was charmed with this letter. He had been glad to see that André had no idea that he was in any way implicated in the business of the poem. The Superior had not said where the verses had been found. The scent was stale. It was just as well, although Lucien would not have had so much to reproach him with, since André was still attached to him. And Georges had no need to be jealous now, since he himself had another object. It was chiefly for that reason that the letter had pleased him: it spoke the language of tenderness which he felt within himself. It corresponded to his own state of mind.

The train had just pulled out of S. station; young Motier must be on it somewhere. Georges had been tempted to look, but he did not move from his corner. He was sure of the other's presence; it was manifest in his own disturbed condition. He could hardly listen to what Lucien was saying—it was something about the fatal poem which, apparently, he could

not recall having kept, much less lost. He went on to talk of his intention to rid himself of his pious works by passing them on to various class-mates.

Little by little the sweet feelings which Georges was experiencing began to change their nature. He was suddenly scared by the strength of his own passion: that of André and Lucien seemed to him trifling by comparison. He was no longer intimidated by the other boy, but by himself. He found himself hoping that the boy was not on the train and would not be returning to St Claude's. The idea seemed to him odious; but, also, reasonable. He was putting all his hopes in this friendship, yet hoping that it would never flower; it was as if he feared that it would produce complications far more serious than those which André and Lucien had experienced.

On the way up from the station to the school Maurice came over to thank Georges for his letter. He to whom the letter had really been addressed was running and playing in the distance: he was making and hurling snowballs, clambering over banks, sliding along the surface of frozen gutters, all, certainly, unaware of the ordeals which his return to college might have in store for him.

As laid down in the book of rules, the whole college community foregathered in junior study "to pay its respects to M. le Supérieur and MM. les Professeurs. A boy in the Philosophy form read a formal greeting to which the Superior replied in the words of the Benedictine motto: *Ora et Labora*. Georges had seen the junior school boy whose image had taken possession of his soul: he was at the far end of the fourth row. He could see only his back and, from time to time, his profile: they were sufficient to delight him. The Superior was saying, "Prayer never stands in the way of work, which is why we make you pray as

much as possible. The time which we devote to God is never wasted. When St Raymond Nonnat, still a simple shepherd, was in prayer, an angel watched over his flock and drove away the wolves.”

They went to evening chapel. Georges was anxious: there might have been changes of place among the junior school boys. He blessed heaven when young Motier knelt in the same place as on the last day of the old term.

The liturgical ornaments were white, but this first *salut* of the New Year lost nothing to the first mass in October: the colour of love was still predominant. There was not only the red lamp over the altar, as usual; a *crèche* had been contrived in the nave, during the holidays, and the lamps which illuminated it were all red. They reminded Georges of a passage in *The Song of Songs* which he had copied into his notebook: “For love is strong as death, its ardour as cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire which hath a most vehement flame.” [This differs, of course, from the English translations; in them the middle phrase is “*jealousy* is as cruel as the grave” (8.vi.) E.H.] Love and friendship—were they not the same thing? Fersen’s verses, too, associated “*Ami*” with “*Amour*”. And the *Noël* which the *schola* were singing was full of love. The Holy Spirit was “the spirit of love”—Georges was recalling the canticle of his first term’s service. Very few of the lectures and sermons of the Retreat had failed to make some allusion to love. Georges had smiled at the word; but now he understood it; not in vain would it have been so freely used by his mentors.

Yes, in that very moment, among the singing and the lights and the incense, he rid himself of the last of his fears. He swore to conquer him, the boy whom fate had presented to him,

the challenge of living beauty.

The following morning he was surprised when the other, for whom he had dressed and brushed his hair with particular care, did not appear in his place. He saw him at one of the other altars, serving mass for Father Lauzon. This reminded him that Maurice had done the same office for the Father during several weeks before the holidays. But so long a turn of duty was exceptional, and probably the younger brother would, as was usual, do only one day, or at the most a week.

However, at least the mass was in red (Octave of the Holy Innocents). It was a confirmation of yesterday evening's promises. What other omens was Georges to look for in the fact that the day was the feast of the Holy Innocents? Was there, perhaps, a note of irony in Father Lauzon's acolyte serving mass on such an occasion, as there had been when Lucien did the same office for St Placidius? The boy might, no doubt, still be an innocent; he was too beautiful to be a saint.

The private masses finished before the public one which was prolonged by the administration of communions. Georges kept his eye on Father Lauzon's altar: he wanted the boy to come into his place; the priest seemed to be taking an intolerably long time. At last, however, he had done, and then Georges was fretting because the boy took such a time extinguishing the candles and covering the altar. The small, bright head passed once more behind the balustrade while the priest removed his sacred garments and gave himself up to prayer. The door of the side-chapel opened, then the transept door, and the boy slipped silently into his place. He did not consider himself dispensed from taking part in the

Superior's mass by having served Father Lauzon's; he read the last prayers attentively. A few minutes later the clapper sounded and the school filed out.

The same scene was repeated the next day; and on the day after, and on the Saturday. Friday evening, indeed, brought some compensation; it was the first Friday in the month and, as was customary, there was a *salut* for the Holy Sacrament. Georges had had twenty whole minutes to feast his eyes on his idol.

He began to feel reassured: the boy would surely complete his service by the end of the week, and the low mass of the Sunday—a Sunday in Epiphany—would be the last he would have to hear in the gallery side-chapel. And at the high mass he was in his ordinary place, as if in preparation for the change. “*Ecce advenit . . . he is come!*” said the text. But if Georges scattered gold, incense and myrrh, it was a dead loss. His Kings' gifts did not earn him so much as a smile. It was in vain that he tried to draw attention to himself by dropping his book, and by an outburst of coughing. He had to be content with the boy's mere presence, the pure lines of his person, his elegance of bearing and graceful gestures and the quiet movement of his lips in prayer.

He was a little put out by the evidence of so much zeal for heavenly matters. But he would not let it discourage him, and, like a hero of antiquity, was ready to do battle with the gods themselves.

He came first in Greek that week: but the results of his own class were now of much less importance to him than those of the fifth form. He was waiting to hear a name which would fill the refectory with an exquisite sweetness. Motier minor was seventh in a class of twenty-two. It was by no means bad.

No success at Vespers, but Georges' confidence remained unshaken. "Friendship," he thought, "is like genius: patience prolonged." During the service deacons and acolytes had constantly passed back and forth between them, interrupting the flow of magnetism. But during the low masses of the following week there would be no such disturbance. Georges was impatient for the Sunday to be over. He gave himself a week to win a smile from the boy, and kept count of the days by reference to his calendar. As for poor Lucien, Georges almost forgot to offer his good wishes on the occasion of his name day—it was not only the end of Epiphany but also the feast of St Lucien. During that morning's meditation period the Superior had talked of nothing but the magi.

The following day his subject was St Julian of Antioch who, on the way to give himself up to martyrdom, had converted his persecutor's own son. The lad had come out of school to watch the execution and suddenly, throwing away his school-books and tearing off his tunic, he ran after the martyr and perished with him. These, then, were the auspices under which an act of seduction in the church itself was to be undertaken.

But no! What was this? The boy was again helping the eternal Father Lauzon to put on his eternal red vestments. Georges was not only disappointed and very angry: he was beginning to be uneasy. What could be the meaning of such assiduity? The boy must have dedicated himself to the priesthood, surely? Here was fate mocking him again as it had done in the case of Lucien, the term before. His mind filled with sorrowful thoughts. It seemed to him now that the happiness so ardently desired was, after all, beyond his reach. But could such a flagrant denial of justice be possible?

During break he found a question to ask Maurice Motier about the maths lesson which

came next and, as if that had made him think of the maths master, he said, "You don't serve the Father's mass any more?"

"No, thank you! I've passed the buck to my dear brother!" "You take it in turns?"

"Not likely! I did my month, now it's his turn. It was my mother's idea. She's frightfully religious, and she wanted us both to serve mass, one of us all January, the other all December. That's why we begin and end the year saying Father Lauzon's *amens* for him. He's an intimate friend of our parents."

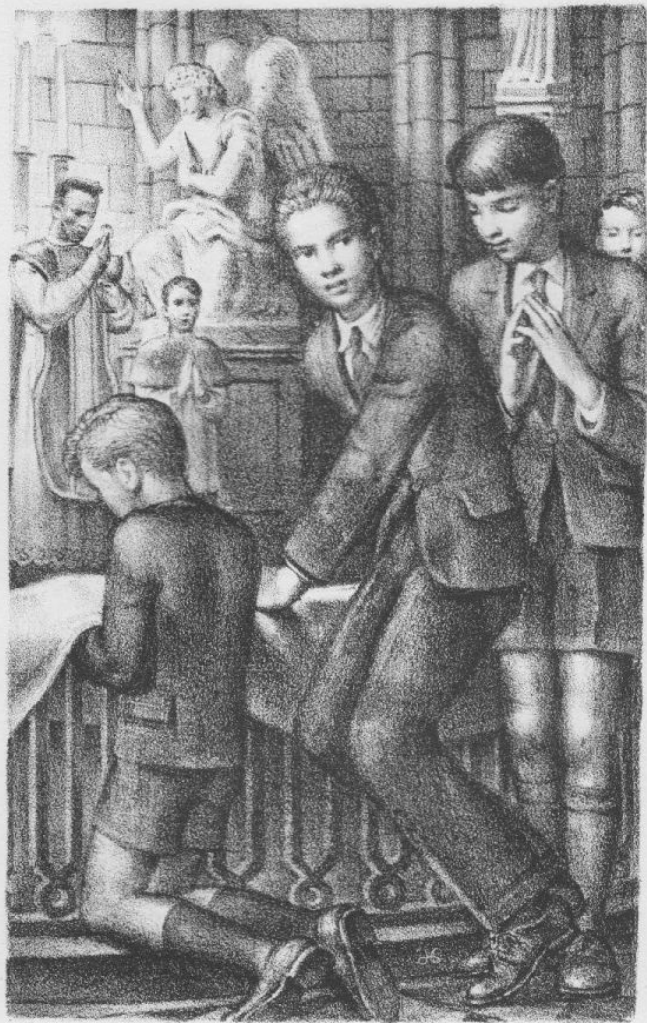
"That's fine I must say! If I were in your shoes I'd be careful. The pair of you will be shaven pated before you know what's hit you—like the Merovingian kings."

"Don't worry," Maurice said, laughing, "we're not a king's sons but a doctor's, and we've got our heads screwed on very firmly. It's decent of you, however, to bother about it. I'll lend you my Richopin's poems if you like."

Georges had already heard some talk of these poems: they were extracts from a collection entitled *Les Caresses*. They were passing from hand to hand among certain initiates who, it was said, copied them onto the margins of their missals so as to learn them by heart during the services—a freedom less worthy of the *grand siècle* than of its successor. Hitherto Georges had shown no curiosity concerning these poems. He had not got beyond Rostand and Fersen. However, he did not want to offend Maurice and thanked him for his obliging offer. And he added, "I'll give you a quiet hand in class, if you like."

Every morning, during mass, he watched the gallery-chapel with an interest no longer marred by alarm. When the boy was kneeling he was hidden by the balustrade, but Georges

could calculate the moment when he would stand up: at the Gospel, the offertory, the consecration, again after communion, etc. These small daily pleasures enabled him to keep his patience; and henceforth chapel gave him the best moments of his day. He had welcomed the ritual round of the stations of the cross on the third Friday, as a reward, and he would have liked to have a *salut* of the Holy Sacrament every evening, as during Retreat. Now, too, nothing gave him greater delight than the Sunday services: high mass and vespers, which he had formerly found so tedious, had now become too short for his taste.



In the refectory, too, his tastes had undergone a change. He was less anxious for the *Deo Gratias*, though that enabled him to chat with Lucien, and he preferred the calm of even the most boring reading. In such conditions he felt himself to be in closer contact with the boy than in the uproar of general conversation. He was freer to turn his eyes more often to the other table. There, too, before Sunday luncheon, he heard a reading which made up for all the rest: that, simply, of a name, in the list of the week's compositions. It was a name which he repeated to himself over and over again, as formerly the names of the gods. When its two syllables had reference to the elder brother, they had a commonplace and uninteresting sound. They sounded delightful and made his heart beat harder when they referred to the younger brother. He was only sorry that it was not customary to read out Christian as well as family names: he wanted to enjoy the sound of the boy's Christian name but he did not dare ask Maurice what it was. He sometimes took pleasure in pretending that it might be Georges.

The boy's place in class for composition was always an honourable one, but Georges detested those who came before him. Proud of his own primacy, he condemned theirs; meanwhile it was more important than ever to be first in his own form, for he hoped that this might serve to fix his name in the other's mind, and even make the other think of him with admiration. And since he had had someone to whom he could dedicate his successes, he was working with a new ardour. He gave up his attempt to understand mathematics but, in order to have better marks, copied still more closely from Lucien's work.

They had been given the following as a subject for a dissertation in French: "You are

given a chance to visit a foreign country.

Which country would you choose, and why?" Georges had chosen Greece. And as he wrote he thought of Greek mythology, of antique statues, of Alexander's coins; he even invoked the image of that hero. But above all he was thinking of the boy in whose person was incarnate, for him, the beauty which the Greeks had worshipped.

He got an excellent mark for it and *le Tatou* had written this comment. "Lively and interesting. Your enthusiasm is tempered by thought. Let it always be as rational and well-considered." He had taken a critical attitude when Georges had used Lucien as a model for his "Portrait of a friend"; but he seemed to approve George's new "enthusiasm".

It was in this fashion, then, that Georges found himself able to deliver to the Superior the five essays necessary to support his candidature for the Academy. If nothing went wrong that noble institution would open its doors to him in February. The results of election were announced in the refectory on the first Sunday of the month—so that Georges had witnessed the ceremony only once since he had been at the college. It was an occasion of glory for the successful candidate who was applauded by the whole school and had to rise and take a bow. February should be a marvellous month for Georges: the boy would have finished his turn of duty in chapel, and Georges would not only be meeting him at last, but glorified by his election. He no longer thought of St Claude's Academy as the ante-room to the *Académie Française*, but as having been founded for the purpose of enabling him to attract the attention of another boy.

Returning from his mission to the Superior, Georges crossed the central courtyard instead of following the corridors through the building. He drew near to the windows of the

junior study, oblongs of bright light in the darkness. The window-panes were clouded by the heat of the room, but it was still possible to see the nearest faces, and moreover to see without being seen. Maurice's brother sat beside the second window, writing. How well he held himself! He might have been posing for a painter, yet his pose was perfectly natural, one leg thrust out into the space between the desks. Pausing in his writing, he bit his pen and raised his head, thinking: no inspiration came, and he turned towards the window. His eyes, though he did not know it, looked into Georges'.

Georges, back in study, had an impulse to give literary expression to his happiness. The inspiration which had avoided the other, settled on him. He thought of "Portrait of a friend"—the one which had been a failure. Here was a good chance to do it over again. This time he would really be writing to the "friend of his heart". Discreetly, with Lucien in mind, he used the home-made shorthand in which he always scribbled his rough drafts and which was indecipherable excepting by himself. When he had finished he was not dissatisfied with what he had written. The "Portrait of a friend" had become a portrait of the Love of Thespis in person. This, he felt, was his only essay which might really have merited academic honours.

Which was all very well, but what was it leading to? The gulf still yawned between them, the division between the senior and junior schools. The very words "division" assumed a new and poignant meaning. Though he and the other boy spent all eternity facing each other in chapel, they would be no nearer to knowing each other. Georges did, indeed, think of the following year when the other would move up into the senior school, but that eventuality was remote. Besides, who could be certain that they would both return to

St Claude's? Anything might happen to prevent it: several boys had not returned to the college at the beginning of the new term. Here and now they were together: were they not to succeed in exchanging so much as a single word? The obstacles were trifling in themselves—panes of a study window, or the steps of the choir in chapel—yet they were impassable. And the doubts which had assailed Georges when he had wondered if the boy was proposing to become a priest, returned in a new shape. He was tempted to confide in Lucien but abandoned the notion: his unhappiness was not of the kind which can be shared, and besides, would there not be more merit in finding a remedy unaided?

He wanted to feel that he had tried everything. Imagining a fortunate chance meeting to be possible, he began, during study, to visit all the masters in turn. He went to borrow books—which he did not read; or to ask for explanations—for which he cared nothing. He humoured the old history and religious instruction master's mania by pretending that he wanted to learn about keeping silk-worms: as a consequence he had to listen to the opinions of M. de Quatrefages, whom the Father liked to quote. Georges even affected a passion for white mice.

His principal recourse, however, was to imaginary scruples of conscience which gave him free access to Father Lauzon: surely young Motier must often be with him? Before and after these interviews Georges hung about in the first-floor corridor, pretending to admire the photographs of school groups which hung, each dated, on the walls: the most recent was three years old; the boy figured in none of them.

During breaks, when it was in order to visit the sick-bay for treatment, Georges did so on various pretexts. He thought of the chilblains for which he had received treatment in

company with Lucien and almost bore Lucien a grudge for having made him waste that trick.

At last the day came when the boy kept his proper place in chapel and Georges' happiness was so great that he forgot all his troubles. First of February: St Ignatius's. Georges recalled the refrain of an old song: "The Democratic Wedding", or "The Wedding of President Fallieres' Daughter"; the song had been unearthed somewhere by Georges' cousins, who were amused by the names of the wedding guests, including:

*Le grand-père Ignace*  
*Le cousin Pancrace,*  
*L'oncle Célestin.*

"In two generations," Georges had told his cousin Liliane, "you and your name will seem just as funny."

The boy was as serious as ever, reading the prayers, keeping his eyes on the altar, almost as if he had sworn an oath not to look at Georges—who never looked at anything or anybody else. At communion, as on the morning before the Christmas holidays, only Lucien stood between them. But he, too, was an impassable obstacle. Having refused to ask the said Lucien's advice, Georges did not feel he could ask for his, albeit passive, assistance. Not only his self-respect, but his taste for secrecy was involved.

The next day, a Thursday, the Superior told M. and Mme de Sarre, who had come for the monthly *exeat*, that their son had been elected to the Academy. Georges was pleased: the boy might refuse to look at him in chapel, but he would be forced to do so when he was

proclaimed an academician, in the refectory.

Sunday. The green of the liturgical ornaments for every Sunday following Epiphany could not, surely, be misleading: his hopes took substance.

Georges, whose name had just rung through the hall, rose to acknowledge the applause. He turned towards the Superior; but, at the same time, his eyes turned towards the boy to whom his triumph was dedicated. And on the evening of that great day he was still thinking of him as he made his way with his new colleagues to his first session of the Academy. He valued the boy above all fame and glory, but he could have wished him to witness this triumph; it occurred to him that Marc would not have been unimpressed by it.

Gravely the academicians crossed the central courtyard, as gravely climbed the principal staircase. At the door of the anteroom their sobriety broke down and there was a wild scramble: for each of these grave gentlemen wanted to make sure of an armchair, of which there were but eight for fifteen academicians and these eight, albeit extremely hard, were at least not so hard as the bench on which the other seven had to sit. Only the three members from the Philosophy class stood aside and watched the rush with disdain. It was their privilege to use the three armchairs in the Superior's study—chairs which were upholstered. As soon as everyone had seized or failed to seize a chair, they knocked at the study door and walked coolly in, very much at home. Their colleagues followed, carrying each a chair or helping to carry the bench.

On their knees, then, for prayers. Then the Superior confirmed Georges in his election and handed over his diploma. This was a sheet of bristol board decorated with medallions representing all the great men of Louis XIV's century. The emblem of the Sun King shed its

rays over the academician's name. The Superior said a few words by way of welcome to the newcomer, in which he did not fail to mention the two old boys who were the pride of the school and who, before being elected to the *Institut*, had been members of St Claude's Academy.

They sat down. Georges was not very comfortable on the bench. He could only hope that Anatole France's seat in the Palais Mazarin would be more comfortable.

The Superior read a sonnet which he had written, "The Farmer's Wife". When this was announced several of the academicians looked at each other with sly smiles. Georges was already aware that the Superior wrote, in the holidays, sonnets which he read during sessions of the Academy. "The Farmer's Wife" ended as follows:

*When you return at eve from field or byre  
The odour of your virtues fills the house.*

Next an academician addressed the meeting on the subject of the duchess of Montausier: they were out of the byre and into the Hotel de Rambouillet in a single jump. Then it was Bossuet's turn: the second half of these meetings was devoted to him.

A member began to read *The Funeral Oration of Nicholas Cornet, Grand-master of the College of Navarre*. The Superior had set himself up in opposition to the theory that the text was not authentic; he considered that it contained certain passages of singular beauty and ought to be rehabilitated. Doubtless, too, he was glad that a college Superior, and one ennobled by the title of Grand Master, should have inspired the Eagle of Meaux to

eloquence; it would, he must believe, make an impression on his collegian-academicians.

He sat well back in his chair but he kept a vigilant eye glancing over the others. He had crossed his legs, showing his thick soles. His fingers played with a copper paper-knife, carved out of a shell-splinter, on which were engraved the words "God and France". From time to time he rapped the arm of his chair with it, to stop the reader: he would then emphasise a term or comment on a thought, and conclude each of such interruptions with "Is it not so, gentlemen?" Whereupon all present nodded their heads in sign of approbation.

Reacting against the funeral oration, Georges dwelt upon some lines from *Les Caresses*, which Maurice had given him to read and which did not seem to him to be in very good taste.

"*The love which I need, the love which burns . . .*" Yet Riche-pin had been a member of the *Académie Française*, as had Bossuet. And had they not, in their studious youth, both been members of some academy like St Claude's?

The next day, at mass, the boy glanced at him at last: obviously, he had recognised yesterday's hero. He knew his name, and even his Christian name, since the Academy proclamation left nothing out. And if, by chance, he too was called Georges, no doubt he was dwelling upon this happy coincidence of Christian names. But Georges, sitting facing him, had other things to think of, principally that in a few minutes, at communion, they would be standing side by side. For Lucien, having shed all his good works, had, in compensatory zeal, volunteered to serve mass all that week, and was beginning his stint that day. As a result of his absence his two neighbours at the holy table would become immediate

neighbours.

Georges gave himself up to the charm of that prospect. He was counting on it to win him some positive advantage at last. He did not yet know what he was going to do, but he did know that it was an opportunity he must and would not let slip. Their destiny, his and the boy's, would depend on the short moment allowed him during each of the next few mornings. But this first morning Georges, having made no plan, accomplished nothing: the boy had, in any case, been too absorbed even to notice any difference in the arrangements.

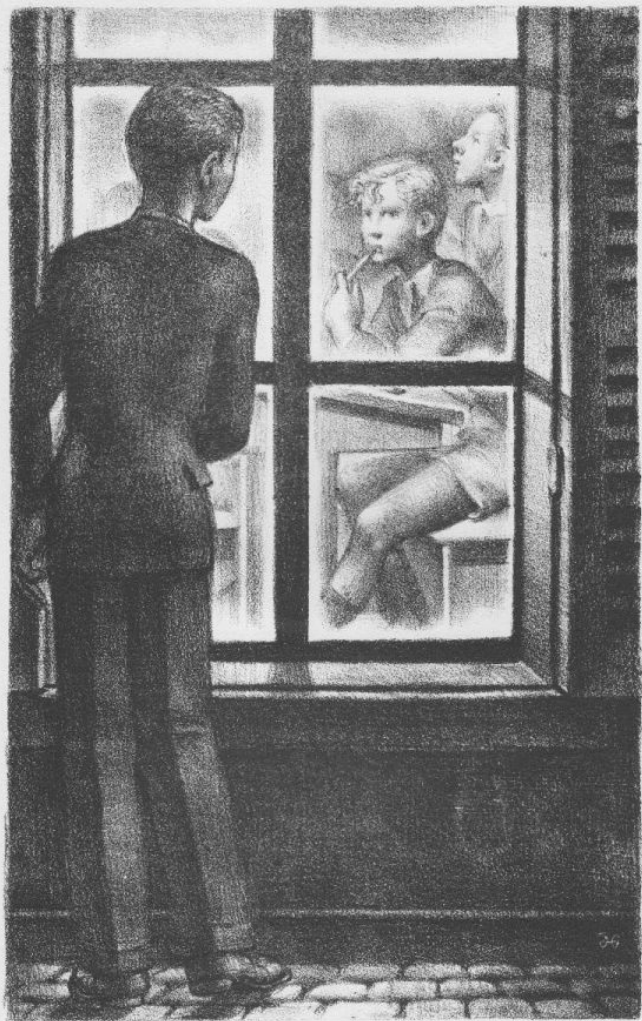
On the following day Georges hoped to draw attention to himself by a copious use of lavender-scented hair-oil; but what did the scent of lavender matter to a boy who was giving his whole heart to making communion? And he was, of course, right, right in being unable even to imagine that anyone would dare to make use of such a place and such circumstances for questionable ends. Even Georges had had some difficulty in hardening his heart against his own scruples. But he had told himself that "who wills the end, wills the means". It was not his fault; no other way was open to him. Still, he could not help wondering if the boy would think as he did, and he was in some anxiety lest, instead of seducing, he shocked him. And he awaited each communion in the same state of anxiety. Once again the pleasure he had hoped for was turning into misery.

On the Wednesday Georges had touched the boy's elbow while raising the cloth; he tried it again, with more deliberate emphasis, on the Thursday. He was beginning to feel angry that his presence was still being completely ignored. On the Friday—it was February 10th, he made a note of the date—he was determined to overcome this excessive virtuousness. The resistance he was meeting with was becoming exasperating, and it was time to bring

matters to a head: the guardian angel and the Cupid of Thespis were locked in strife; one or the other must be thrown.

Before communion he watched, with affectionate irony, the other boy absorbed in his paternosters and concentrating on every syllable of the mass—the mass of St Scholastique, Virgin. How that youthful and virgin scholar was going to be shaken out of his solemnity!

When the boy came and knelt beside him Georges pressed his arm deliberately. He had thought himself perfectly calm and collected but his own action disturbed him more than he had expected and he was for a moment frightened by what he had done. The attempts he had made previously were nothing; this morning's was, in its deliberate insistence, almost sacrilegious. He was impatient to get back to his seat and cover his face with his hands in the customary gesture of ritual respect. So doing he would be able to peep at the boy between his fingers: no doubt he would find him crimson with embarrassment.



No such thing: he was praying! No doubt about it, he must be one of the pure in spirit! And only creatures of flesh and blood were capable of being moved by human feeling. It looked as if George's sacrilege had been to no purpose. But before Georges could give this discovery any more thought, he saw the boy uncover his eyes and look straight at him. His expression signified astonishment—and an astonishment devoid of goodwill. Evidently Georges' demonstration had been misunderstood: M. de Sarre was being judged—and judged somewhat ill-bred.

Georges was disappointed but relieved. It might have been worse and he was now free to proceed.

Saturday. Two more days and Lucien's return would bring these happy communions to an end. No time was to be lost in bringing the business to a conclusion. Georges administered a series of quick nudges with his arm: surely the boy could not continue in the illusion that Georges was indulging in ill-bred horse-play? Back in his place, and even before covering his face, he looked across at Georges: this time he looked intrigued. Evidently he was beginning to suspect that Georges' behaviour had some meaning.

For the last morning Georges had thought of a new move, one which would leave the other in no possible doubt. During the whole time they were at the altar he kept his knee in contact with the other boy's.

This time success was total. As soon as he was back in his place the boy stared across at his strange *vis-à-vis*. More than once before the service was over their eyes met. Georges

considered smiling at him but was afraid of getting no response. A smile would not excuse his behaviour if his intentions had not been perfectly understood. Let him once make himself properly understood and the smile would follow of its own accord.

High mass brought them completely to grips. Georges, to keep himself in countenance, occasionally read a few lines of the service for Septuagesima—for, as the Superior had said, they were “entering upon Septuagesima” and the green liturgical ornaments had given way to violet ones—in sign of repentance. Not repentance, however, but hope filled Georges’ heart. It was not for him that the *De profundis* featured in the text for the day. More suitable to his mood would have been a song of *Alleluia!* A paean. *Evoe Bacche!*

But what must the boy be thinking of a senior with so little respect for holy things, and whose regard—of a questionable order moreover—was concentrated on himself instead? Well, whatever he thought of the new academician, he certainly knew more about him than he had done a week ago.

Once again Georges came first in composition and was glad of it. The boy could hardly fail to be quite proud of being an object of interest to a senior boy who was brilliant in his work, top of his own brother’s form, and who bore, moreover, a noble name. As for the boy, he himself came second in his form. This placing showed great progress and Georges enjoyed thinking that it might be due to progress in composition. That would be one more favourable sign, a sign, perhaps, that the Muses were to preside over their intercourse.

Even so, during the long break Georges was in a state of great anxiety; he was watching for Maurice, who had gone to see his younger brother as the rules allowed him to do on Sundays, to return. Hitherto Georges had been glad of these visits, for it had seemed a kind

of tenuous contact with the younger boy. This time, however, he could have wished that Maurice had not gone, for he could not help wondering whether the boy would not say something of his manœuvres. Maurice's greeting reassured him: his anxiety had been in vain, the secret had been kept. But had the motive for that been shame, or complicity?

At Monday morning's communion Georges was separated from the boy, who thereupon looked his surprise. To enable him to guess the reason for this change, Georges turned his head towards Lucien, who was back in his place. The boy would gather that their intrigue was to be hidden from their neighbour, as it had been hidden from his brother. And the expression on his face had been the proof which Georges was waiting for.

It was clear that the boy was already flirting with Georges, but how deliberately? He frequently looked at Georges, but the purport of his looks was uncertain. Georges could, however, see that despite his pretence to be following the mass, he was, in fact, inattentive. And Georges had noticed another fact which was not without significance. The boy's errant locks were admirably combed that morning.

The following day, going to the altar, Georges managed to slip in front of Lucien, who muttered, "What's got into you?"

"It makes a change," Georges replied.

The boy must have realised that this manœuvre had required boldness and merited reward; back in his place, he smiled. With how much joy did Georges receive and return that smile! And he felt some pride, too, in having attained his ends, in having cunningly regulated the extent of each advance. He experienced the heady stimulant of triumph, the dearest of all triumphs. Not until now had he really lived.

At the same time there was an ostensible return to his place in the community. Henceforth he would be forced to read through the service like anybody else, for it would now be impossible to meet the boy's eyes without smiling. He would even have to avoid standing beside him at communion. Now that contact was established there was no point in running the risk of attracting attention to either the boy or himself. They must now contain their feelings: the essential point was made.

The week passed calmly. Every morning the eyes of Georges and the other boy met, held, parted; thereafter each read his missal.

It gave Georges pleasure to find food for love in the day's liturgy. What had been an occasional amusement now became his rule; things divine had assumed a new humanity. Words pertaining to the day's saints he made his own—"You have placed upon my head a crown of precious stones", or "Come, in thy splendour and thy beauty, triumph and reign". There were also other phrases which were not so much to his taste: "Happy is the man who fears the Lord!" "Concupiscence gives birth to sin and sin accomplished engenders death." The boy was reading the same texts: but did he see them in the same light? And which of them touched him most nearly?

Sunday in Sexagesima. On his way to chapel Georges repeated the words over and over, like an exercise in elocution; the Superior had gabbled it badly during his morning address.

In honour of Sexagesima the boy had put on a red tie which appeared to be quite new. He must have noticed that on Sundays Georges wore a similar one, with his blue suit. He was doubtless ignorant of the fact that the colour he was flaunting is the colour of love. A few

minutes before communion he closed his book and stared at Georges gravely: was he waiting for the minute to come?

At the altar he slipped neatly behind Lucien, who was thus pushed aside, and his elbow touched Georges' arm. The white cloth trembled a little in their sustaining hands.

Georges hated himself for spoiling his own happiness by a reflection he could not banish: was this any more than a kind of childish ragging? That, at all events, seemed to be the hypothesis which Lucien had adopted, for he made no comment on this new incident.

That week the boy came third in historical composition and Georges second in his own class. Each had lost one place. Georges thought of the subjects for the subsequent weeks—geography, maths, natural sciences—which would cause him to slip farther down the slope, for it was difficult to copy when it came to original work. At least he had been lucky in that the order of compositions had been in his favour just when he needed prestige. Now, he no longer cared; let the laurel-crowns of scholarship give way to the crown of precious stones.

When the results for the week had all been read out, he turned to look at the boy, and met his eyes, for they had had the same idea. Henceforth the refectory, too, would find them exchanging smiles.

At the beginning of the long after-lunch break, when Lucien had gone off to practise the piano and Georges was watching Maurice set off to pay his usual visit in junior school, Georges suddenly, seeing Maurice's brother enter the room, felt as if he were the victim of an illusion.

Maurice was apparently as surprised as himself: he was certainly not accustomed to receiving such respectful consideration from his junior. He took him into a corner of the

courtyard and gave him a letter to read. As he read the boy kept raising his head, as he did in chapel, and as if he were searching for someone. At last he saw Georges, but looked at him without smiling.

The boy's look was so grave that Georges did not dare go any nearer. But when he received another equally serious look he understood what was meant. The boy had come for his sake only and by so doing had confirmed Georges in his conquest.

Now Maurice was growing impatient and offering to take the letter back: the younger brother had not finished reading it. It occurred to Georges that he was not, in fact, reading it at all and might be wondering anxiously, "Is he never coming? Yet what he has to do isn't so difficult as what I've done."

Lucien had left a ball in Georges' hands. He threw it in the required direction and then ran to pick it up again. Maurice got it first and was raising his arm to throw it back when his brother knocked it out of his hand. This feigned act of mischief was his response to Georges' stratagem: Georges was able to pick up the ball quite near to them. He nodded his head towards the younger boy and asked Maurice, "Is he your brother?"

"What! You're not acquainted though you're wearing similar ties?"

Both flushed, as if the colour of their ties had been conveyed to their cheeks. Maurice, assuming a pompous air, said, "Let me introduce the junior-school pupil Alexander, who will soon become a senior; fifth form, aged twelve and a half, congregation-alist of the Most Holy Virgin and, to his brother's shame, only third in history." And, turning to his brother, "I present the heir presumptive to the Marquisate of Sarre and other domains, academician and collector of first places in form."

They all laughed. Georges shook the boy's hand, and the touch of his slim fingers disturbed him. He was engraving the face on which his eyes and thoughts had dwelt so constantly, on his heart. The February sun set a halo of its cold rays about the boy's person. His eyes, which Georges could at last see properly, were the same golden colour as his hair, and a lock of hair had escaped and hung over them as if to hide them. The boy tossed it aside with a graceful movement of his head.

And Georges did not feel bold enough to speak to him. Instead he turned to Maurice and, unable to think of anything amusing to say even to him, said, "You deserved a higher place in history in my opinion."

And the boy, whose laughing eyes gleamed in the sun, looked at his brother and, in his light voice, said, "It's nice of him to say that."

During the walk Georges was very high-spirited. He could almost have hugged Lucien. He asked for the more intriguing details of his long vacation with André. But Lucien, becoming reticent again, maintained that his Christmas letter had told all there was to tell. It was clear that he was determined to avoid stirring memories of that order and, albeit friendly, was being careful. Georges wanted to assure him that he had nothing to worry about; he would not have been embarrassed.

That Sunday's sonnet from the Superior was entitled "The Nightingale":

*In the serene calm of the silvery night . . .*

Subsequently, during the continued reading of the funeral oration of Nicholas Cornet, the Superior complained that the reading wanted spirit and said to the reader, "Come, come, Monsieur So-and-So, put a little life into your reading."

And soon, unable to bear it any longer, he seized the book and began to declaim the text himself, as if he were about to fly off out of the windows with the Eagle of Meaux. And Georges was thinking that he would have liked the boy to be there today even more than on the first occasion—if only to render the meeting something like tolerable. Without him the Academy was no better than a wretched farce, and its ridiculous laurels had no excellence but what might have been conferred on them had *he* been wearing them. Besides, perhaps he was entitled to them: he had been second in French composition and his form, the lowest from which members might be elected, was in fact represented by one boy. Surely young Motier was an obvious candidate. Why not conduct a campaign in his favour, discover a thousand hidden beauties in five of his works? He, Georges, would have entered the Academy not merely to please his friend, but to make him, too, a member. The idea consoled him for having again failed to secure one of the chairs, even telling himself that if Alexander did become a member they would choose the bench so that they could sit side by side.

After the meeting Georges parted from his colleagues and loitered along by the junior school study. He stopped for a moment outside the familiar window and watched the boy at work. This time there was no question of the image of a dream, but of a reality: the boy who sat there in incomparable beauty was his friend.

While waiting, then, to make Alexander an academician, he decided that he must join the Congregation; that was not so difficult. How had he failed to realise for himself that young

Motier would, of course, be a Child of Mary out of regard for the director of the Congregation? He had had to learn the fact from Maurice. The Congregational session followed the Academy's. When Georges saw Lucien setting off for the chapel he said:

"You know, I think I'll go with you next Sunday. Lauzon is pestering me to join you again and I have a feeling that my prize for religious instruction may be in danger."

Not knowing what to do with himself during the last half-hour of study, he took out his Virgil and worked over the morrow's passage to be construed. It was the crisis in the episode of Nisus and Euryale, a passage which had never appealed to him. While translating it he recalled the first lines, which treat of the young Euryale's beauty; and the features of the boy he loved gave new life to the ancient text.

The fate of the two heroes, united in friendship, moved him, and he could think of nothing more wonderful than to die, like Nisus, on the breast of Euryale. His own strength of feeling astonished him; and he would never have believed that he would ever shed tears while translating a Latin text.

At bed-time Georges had felt sure that, tired by the walk, he would fall asleep before the Supervisor of Studies left the dormitory. He did not want so remarkable a day to end in the usual idle chatter. He was impatient to be alone with himself, with the boy who had suddenly become a second self. Throughout the afternoon an enchanted vision had been in the background of his imagination. In the silence of the dormitory it came at last into the foreground of his mind where he could contemplate it at his ease.

Georges lived again through those minutes which had been his reward. He could still feel the other's elbow against his own, the small hand in his own. He could read the boy's

glance over again and repeat his words: "It's nice of him to say that." Above all he now had a Christian name to dwell on, to delight in; and it was a name which seemed especially chosen to attach the other boy to his own secret world, to call him up from the depths of his own life as from the depths of the legend.

It was, as it were, a worthy conclusion to a series of miracles. There' was Alexander's stater in the medal-cabinet at home, the most beautiful coin of the collection: it had inspired Georges' essay on Greece. Then, in his *History of Antiquity*, there was the enchanting phrase, "Alexander, the son of Philip, was celebrated for his beauty." The son of Philip? The son of a doctor? Alexander was the son of Jupiter: had not the Oracle said so?

Georges did not regret that the boy's Christian name differed from his own, for he considered it finer. He even preferred the name Motier to the name de Sarre. Yet he was not vexed with Maurice for having revealed his rank and title. Might it not serve to elevate him a little in the eyes of one who had dazzled him after another fashion, and before whom he had stood embarrassed?

That evening he went and told Father Lauzon of his decision, after mature consideration, to join the Congregation. The good Father smiled triumphantly and took his hand.

"I am very glad of this decision, for your own sake," he said. "It will open a way to great happiness for you. As you know, I have long considered that your place was with us, but I could not but respect your reasons for waiting—very respectable reasons, although in my opinion over-scrupulous. So I, too, waited; I could do nothing about it and I should have been uneasy had the Holy Virgin been obliged to wait any longer. It is not possible to be, and

to remain, a good pupil, without being a Child of Mary. It is, at one and the same time, the true crown of piety and the best method of ensuring a good result in one's work. You will remember poor Blajan, for example: despite his fervour he could not make up his mind to join the Congregation; as a consequence he fell ill and will lose a year of his school life.

"I should hesitate to be over-bold and consider that his provocative attitude has been punished in this fashion, but I cannot but wonder at the coincidence. It is like another fact which you are free to check for yourself: however overcast the weather may be the sun never fails to shine on a Saturday, even if only for a few moments. Now Saturday is sacred, as you know, to the Holy Virgin. In that case, to, it would be childish, even imprudent, to come to any definite conclusion, since the cause is infinitely greater in importance than the effect; but it is another coincidence of the same order and I confine myself to wondering at it—and admiring it."

Georges asked if he could be present at next Sunday's meeting in the chapel.

"Since you show so much zeal I will take it upon myself to let you waive the usual period of observation: you will therefore come next Sunday. You are aware, of course, that newcomers are received, in the first instance, as aspirants, without ceremony, and only later, after three months, as a full member in due form. That is, after three months, but I will shorten the probationary period in your favour."

He consulted the calendar on his table.

"Today is February 20th. Consequently, according to the rules, your final admission should not take place until May 21st.

I feel sure, however, that you would prefer it to take place in the month dedicated to Her

whose child you aspire to be. I will therefore bring your full and formal admission forward to Sunday, April 30th, that is the eve of the month of Mary.” He added, “I need hardly say that you will naturally be resolved not to disappoint the trust I am placing in you. Especially when you consider that I am shortening your period of waiting by more than a fortnight. I have, never done it before and I must beg you to say nothing to anybody, so as to avoid causing jealousy.”

The Father rose and took two booklets from the bookcase, and offered them to Georges.

“Here,” he said, “is the *Manual of the Children of Mary* and it calls for no comment. The other is a short treatise, of which I am myself the author, and which won a prize at Rouen in 1911, . at the *Académie des Palinods*. The subject set was “The Most Holy Virgin considered above all but not exclusively in her Immaculate Conception”. I do not wish to boast, but you, being an academician, will profit from it in two ways. For, as you know, the Queen of Heaven is also the Queen of our minds, our intelligence. Even the ancients, whom you admire so much, had written of her, prophetically, in the Eclogue to Pollio—*Jam redit et Virgo . . .*”

As he spoke the Father was looking through a pile of open exercise-books.

“Yes,” he said, “yes—I just wanted to make sure. Your latest arithmetic homework is very good. I have, in fact, been much impressed with your progress since January. Are you not a little surprised at it yourself? Think it over.”

Georges was delighted: everything was turning out as he had hoped, and people were making themselves the instruments of his will. His good fortune had cost him nothing but patience: like Father Lauzon, he had had to wait. And now everything was combining to

carry him to his secret goal.

On the landing, he saw Alexander coming up the stairs three at a time, towards him. And this encounter, hoped for in vain for three weeks, now seemed perfectly natural. Fate's smiles no longer surprised him, they were his due.

"Where are you running to so fast?" he asked the boy.

"To Father Lauzon's."

"I've just been with him, but if you have no objection I'll walk back with you as far as his door."

They went together. Georges was hoping that they would not meet one of the masters. But only the old boys whose photographs decorated the walls of the corridor saw them pass. Georges, pointing them out, said, "I am proud that they should see me today."

He thought of telling the boy that he had just joined the Congregation for his sake; but he had already paid him one compliment in his remark about old boys: it would not be wise to overdo it. When they reached the door of the priest's room he offered Alexander his hand and took leave of him. Then, with lowered eyes, he added what both knew perfectly well already.

"We're friends, aren't we?"

"Yes," the boy whispered.

Back in study, Georges took himself to task for having been too sentimental and not sufficiently practical. The meeting had been as charming as Sunday's, but had not accomplished anything. Alexander had made that one visit, in the playground, but he might never do so again. Georges had happened to meet him today, but that might never happen

again. He should have seized the opportunity to arrange for their next meeting, or at least for an exchange of letters. The idea of a meeting alarmed him, but the other alternative struck him as having possibilities: he would send a note.

He thought of the notes which passed from hand to hand during study until they reached their destination. He would not want to trust his note to anyone else; if he was to deliver it to Alexander in person he would have to wait for the Congregation meeting. But the possibility of doing this would depend on their respective places; moreover Sunday was a long way off. In fact their only certain meeting-place was still at the altar and provided they could get round Lucien. The boy had accepted the clandestine contact of elbow-touching. Would he be as ready to accept a note? Georges was fired by the element of risk. He would make trial of the boy's mettle: the time had come to break the window-pane, climb the steps which had separated them.

Throughout all the next day he thought about the form his message should take. His hardest school work seemed very simple by comparison. In the first place, should he write "Alexander" or should he shorten it to "Alex" or something of the sort? Would it not be ridiculous to call him "my dear boy" or "my well-beloved"? He was reminded of the poetry about the Well-Beloved. During study that evening he amused himself by writing mixtures of their two names in his rough notebook, while turning over numerous forms of words in his mind.

He had sworn, presumptuously, that he would be ready by the morrow, yet it passed and by the evening of the next day he had written nothing and the Superior would be there at any moment to deliver his sacred reading. Georges could hesitate no longer; he seized a sheet of

paper and wrote mechanically,

*Mon Bien-Aime, je t'ai cherché Depuis l'aurore . . . etc.*

He felt rather ashamed of making use of the poem which had been used in Lucien's case. On the other hand was not the boy the real, the true Well-Beloved? Lucien had never really filled that role. He was, in relation to Alexander, what Lucius Verus was to the other Alexander.

Georges signed his name to the poem. He had not done so in Lucien's notebook, out of respect for literature rather than for any other reason. This time, signing, he took pleasure in it as an act of courage which justified the fraud. There could be no doubt that if the paper was found he would be expelled, even if the Superior was more familiar with Edmond Rostand than with the Baron de Fersen. He was ready to take that risk.

Before communion he had managed to draw the boy's attention to the note which was for him, and which he held in his folded hands; Alexander had shown no surprise. And he managed to slip the note into the other's hand after once again moving up into Lucien's place.

He had some fear that Lucien would comment on all this dodging about, so often repeated, but Lucien pretended to notice nothing. Still, Georges hoped that the boy would have the prudence to allow several days to pass before passing him an answer, and he believed Alexander would guess what was in his mind.

However, on the Sunday morning, as soon as they were all in chapel, Alexander smiled

at him significantly and a few moments later briefly displayed a square of white paper against the red of his tie.

Georges would have opened the note under cover of his missal had he not feared to be overlooked by Lucien. But as soon as they were all in study he took the largest of his books—his Virgil—and opened the little sheet of paper inside it. The writing was very small and delicate, a clumsily rhymed poem, surrounded by a garland of flowers very prettily drawn.

*Georges,*

*Thank you for your charming poem.*

*I think of you all the time.*

*I am working hard so as not to be left in the fifth*

*So that we can be together next year*

*Which will be fine because you love me*

*And I, you.*

[Roughly rhymed lines in the French, but not metrical. E.H.]

After the signature appeared a PS.: *Say nothing to Maurice* and then, in brackets, *One of the rhymes doesn't rhyme.*

Georges looked again at the drawing, the folds of the paper, the blue ink. As if to blow away a speck of dust he lowered his head and kissed the letter. Then, having carefully

refolded it, he put it into his wallet, together with his photograph of the Cupid of Thespis.

Then he wrote the customary letter to his parents, and he could not recall ever having written them so affectionately. As a rule he began, *Cher papa et chère maman*; but this time he wrote, *Bien cher petit papa et bien chère petite maman*. The letter included poetic sentences on the rays of sunshine playing through the study, and the crowing of a cock which he could hear in the distance. He also wrote of the mathematics test—that week's composition—the results of which would shortly be announced, in a tone of assurance. Yet he really expected to be badly placed, since he had been forced to rely on his own powers—he wondered, indeed, whether Father Lauzon would not suspect him of having displeased the Holy Virgin. Finally, exceeding his customary moderation, he sent “a million kisses”.

Oddly enough he found his boasting in the matter of mathematics vindicated: when the results were read out at noon he was astonished to hear his name in the eighth place. Perhaps Father Lauzon had been determined to show him that mathematical problems were better solved if one turned Congregationist. In which case Georges owed his improved place to Alexander, since he had only joined the Congregation for his sake. And he was also pleased to play second to his friend for once: Alexander was fifth in his class.

At the Academy session Georges was able to secure a chair, yet found the session desperately long. He wished the whole programme at the devil—the Superior's sonnet, Pascal's conversion, and the Grand Master of the College of Navarre. He could think of one thing only: the time for the Congregation meeting—a wonderful justification of his title as an aspirant.

Shortly after his return to the study Father Lauzon appeared at the door of the room: this

was the signal for the Children of Mary to move into the chapel.

Alexander's eyes lit with happy surprise. But Georges had been right not to count on an exchange of notes at this meeting. The fully licensed Congregationists were on the left of the nave, the rest on the right. During the homily Georges was able to lean forward and catch a glimpse of Alexander's profile.

That night Lucien said to him, "Don't go to sleep at once tonight, even if you are tired by the walk."

He looked rather sly and Georges at once realised that his secret was out. Alexander was going to be discussed. Lucien had, probably, not dared broach so delicate a subject in broad daylight. The gloaming would give him the courage to question his friend, in a whisper. Georges was no longer alone, after dark, with his other friend.

"Your attitude is hurtful," Lucien said. "You don't trust me. Anyone would think I was a treacherous brother instead of a friend. Do you suppose I couldn't see you were reading a note this morning? And it wasn't hard to guess the reason for shifting places at communion, and your joining the Congregation, and certain smiles I spotted. You've been hiding a lot of things from me. It's not very nice of you."

Georges was touched by Lucien's tone and manner. He had feared something different—sharp reproaches not unjustified, or biting sneers which would have been hard to bear. He said:

"My dear Lucien, we *are* friends and always will be. If I pulled the wool over your eyes it wasn't because I didn't trust you, I swear it wasn't. It was—because I wanted to, because I enjoyed it, and a bit because I was—ashamed. And besides, I was afraid you'd be angry

because I was—looking elsewhere for friendship.”

“But of course I’m not. I’ll say I’m delighted if it’ll make you feel better.”

Georges laughed and Lucien went on, “Besides, you know perfectly well I have another friend myself. I always admired the way André managed things with me—that chilblains business; but I’ve even more admiration for your nerve in picking on a boy in junior school. I didn’t say anything but I watched you at work and got a lot of fun out of it. It was my turn to be the onlooker, old man—remember your remarks, at the beginning, about André and me? What’s young Motier’s first name, by the way?”

Uttering it gave Georges an exquisite pleasure; and, as he began to tell the whole story, saving only the part concerning his adaptation of the poem, he regretted not having spoken freely before; his discretion had been depriving him of a pleasure. He wondered to what extent its intensity was due to the fact that Lucien was his confidant. But what if this were so? Why should not memories of things past be summoned to reinforce present pleasure, the new friendship? They could, after all, not prevent it from being beyond comparison the sweeter.

Lucien pointed out that Alexander and André began with the same letter and that, etymologically, they were similar. And he offered to act as postman between the two friends, should they have occasion for one.

“If,” he said, “you’re a poet, you’ll have ample material to hand. Given a name like Alexander, it means you have all Olympus to choose from. It isn’t like my case—copying Rostand has to do for me.”

“You’d rather Fersen were the model,” Georges said.

Lucien merely smiled and said that he was looking forward to learning Alexander's birthday, hour and place so that, during the next holidays, he could have his horoscope cast. Georges' horoscope could be cast at the same time and they would be able to see if the stars destined them, like André and Lucien himself, for a place in the roll of famous friendships.

A solemn session of the Academy was held in Lent. For a company of scholars devoted, in the main, to the reading of funeral orations and the cult of the *grand siècle*, the choice of date seemed to Georges unsuitable. Nevertheless he had joyfully agreed to be one of the orators of the day—the 28th of the March which had just begun. It would give him another chance to shine before Alexander. On the other hand, what a subject he had been landed with—L'Hotel de Rambouillet! The garland which Alexander had drawn on his note meant more to him than the “Garland of Julie”.

Glancing through a work which might be useful to him in composing his oration, he came across a photograph of the Map of Love. In default of the heavenly chart which Lucien had yet to procure him, Georges decided to orientate his affection by means of this other chart. Might not Mile de Scudery turn out to be, at least in the *Pays du Tendre*, a better guide than her brother in the land of literature?

The Map of Love was not easy to read. Evidently one needed sharp eyes to make one's way through that country. But Georges discovered in it some of the stages in his own itinerary, others he had anticipated: “Pretty Poems”, “Love Letters”, “Sincerity”, “True Heart”, “Probity”, “Assiduity”, “Little Attentions”, “Great Services”, “Sensibility”, and “Constant Friendship”.

He might also claim the freedom of every city in the land whose map he was reading—*Tendre-sur-Estime*, *Tendre-sur-Inclination* and *Tendre-sur-Reconnaissance*. Had not inclination drawn him to Alexander? And esteem had bound Alexander to him. As for their gratitude, it was reciprocal now that their affection was no less so.

There were certain places marked on the map which would certainly not be on their road—*Neglect*, for example, *Inequality*, *Light-mindedness*, *Forgetfulness*, *Indifference*, *Indiscretion*, *Perfidy*. But the fact was, the whole thing was somewhat insipid, although there were, in addition, two other place-names which might stimulate the imagination—*Dangerous Sea* and *Unknown Territory*.

Georges and Lucien never spoke of Alexander during the daytime. The subject was kept for their nocturnal conversations—as it had been the first time it was broached. Invisible, Alexander was none the less present, seated between them, embellished, by the time and place, with extra charm.

Georges could have wished that Alexander alone had been the subject of these conversations, but Lucien was for ever confusing the boy's lineaments by introducing André's. Turn and turn about, then, they sang their respective heroes' praises, rather in the manner of the shepherds who recite alternating verses in the eclogues. But their lyricisms differed: Georges' was, necessarily, both decent, and the reverse of copious; Lucien, on the other hand, now completely reassured as to his neighbour's tolerance, allowed himself even more licence than in their earlier conversations. So that Georges was now embarrassed by confidences which, formerly, he had tried to elicit. The very place where he lay evoking images of Alexander had, a year ago, been André's. And the friendship which was being

described to him with so much cynicism was at least teaching him to realise what his own friendship was not. More often than not he found himself wishing that each had kept his secrets to himself, but there were times when he envied Lucien's. And only Lucien could have made such secrets palatable; for when chance had revealed to him secrets of the same order in other friendships met with in college, they had inspired him with nothing but disgust. Yet there were days when this same disgust seemed to him false. One day he was all for purity and the ideal; the next, he would feel himself influenced by contrary examples. He recalled phrases he had read in *The Song of Songs*—"A garden enclosed . . . A fountain sealed . . ." Did it not lie in his power to gather all the fruits of that garden? and, if he wished to do so, to disturb the limpid waters of that fountain . . . ?

During a break, by pretending that he must go to piano practice, he made his way to the junior school playground.

He stopped at the end of the corridor which opened into that playground. There he waited a moment, hoping that he would see Alexander and might be able to call him. But the boy did not show himself and Georges dared not go any farther.

When he had retraced his steps he began calling himself an ass; he had behaved as he had done on the day of their meeting in the corridor. Trying to find a reason for his want of resolution, he wondered whether it was fear of the Supervisor of Studies which had held him back.

He came to the conclusion that he could be afraid of nobody and that affection for his friend should suffice to make him brave any danger whatsoever. In that case it was his

friend, it was the boy himself, who intimidated him. And Georges thought that he had discovered the origin of his false shame in the feeling that he had, in his note, deceived the other. Before seeing him again he ought surely to send him something better than a borrowed composition.

During study that evening, he accordingly wrote—this time without hesitation—the following note, which he proposed to deliver during communion on the morrow.

*Dear Alexander,*

*I have been living, since Sunday, in the delight of your note. I carry it next to my heart and it makes your presence all the more real to me. The whole college is your presence. Its timetable is a manifestation of your presence. You come down from your dormitory, getting nearer to me, like morning incarnate. At midday I am fed upon you; and, at night, though you seem to draw farther from me, it is only to be the more utterly with me. Did you know this?*

At breakfast Alexander smiled at him; and Georges was satisfied.

At the Holy Table Lucien now kept discreetly out of their way when the occasion required it. Alexander having signed that he had a note to deliver, Lucien changed places with him. Georges managed to read the note in chapel. It consisted of three words written in capitals: *I am happy*.

Georges, too, was happy. But when Lucien asked to see the note he would not give it up;

he had already avoided showing him the first one.

“They’re silly,” he said, “only to me do they mean anything.”

And the fact was that these sillinesses were now all that did mean anything to him. Sometimes, in the course of the day, he would repeat Alexander’s two messages to himself, dwelling upon their savour. In study, or during a lesson, they broke through like sudden sunshine, or like the cock-crow he had been moved to describe to his parents.

But when he lay in bed at night the same words served not to exalt his spirits but rather to calm them. They were no longer a bright beam of light, no longer a triumphal hymn. They were words murmured very low, in his ear, and which merged into his first dream. They were a small night-light watching over his sleeping spirit, like the faint, comforting light which dimly illuminated the whole dormitory.

Georges looked forward to Friday, when he proposed to make another expedition to the junior school during the long break after luncheon. He was hoping that, in honour of the day, Venus would grant him her protection. It had been on a Friday in February that he had first drawn Alexander’s attention to himself by nudging him. Was he not, therefore, right to believe—if only a little—in the fabulous gods?

He went first to the dormitory and drenched his hair with scent. This made him feel both fresher and bolder.

When he came to the end of the corridor where, on the previous occasion, he had hesitated, he saw Alexander immediately opposite him, leaning against a tree. Picking up a small stone, he tossed it towards the boy, who looked his way and instantly appeared delighted. Nevertheless it was with an almost majestic deliberation that he advanced upon

Georges, as if to do him honour even in his gait.

“I’ve come to have a chat with you, if it’s not too risky,” Georges said.

By way of answer the boy made a disdainful motion towards the Father on duty: he was at some distance, and playing football with a group of other boys, his cassock gathered up in one hand.

“Let’s go under those trees,” he said, “we’ll be very comfortable there.”

They sat down on the low wall round the playground. Georges was surprised that his presence had not attracted attention. Things were always easier than he expected them to be. Nevertheless, for form’s sake, he said, “If we are questioned, we must say that I’ve come to see you on Congregation business.”

“I should prefer some other excuse,” Alexander said, laughing. “I’d rather not have Father Lauzon mixed up in our business.”

“It’s true he has been all too frequently mixed up in it already. How I detested him, during January, when he kept you in the upper chapel every single morning!”

“Oh, that! He claims to love me like a son. When I’m cold during break, I go up to his room to get warm, and he gives me a cup of tisane with honey in it. I’m one of his penitents. Are you?”

“Naturally, but I don’t get treated to tisane. Oh, by the way, I’d like it if you’d call me *tutor*—it’s so much nicer.”

“Good. Do you remember my verse—which didn’t rhyme—in my first letter?

. . . *Puisque vous m’aimez*

*Et que je vous aime.*

It should have read,

... *Puisque tu m'aimes*  
*Et que je t'aime.*

But then, I didn't dare *tutoyer* a great poet and an academician." "If one of us is a great poet, it is you; so all that's lacking is to make you an academician. Have you the necessary marks in French to enable you to stand for election? Incidentally, that will do very well if my presence here is questioned: I am with you merely as an emissary of the Academy."

The younger boy searched his memory, but could only recall two essays which would do: "Seedtime", written during the previous term; and the composition which had won him the second place in form for the week—"The Death of Hector".

Georges offered to help him, in order that the pre-condition for his candidature might the sooner be satisfied; let Alexander tell him the subjects set and he would draw up a plan for a composition, or even scribble a rough draft. The boy thanked him but said that he never cheated.

"Although," he added, "I'm not terribly clever, you know; even in your poetry there are things I don't understand. For example what does *Ton nom répand toutes les huiles principales* mean?"

"That's in the Biblical style," Georges explained, "or rather a pastiche of it; you'll find

the phrase at the beginning of *The Song of Songs*—sorry, I sound pedantic . . .”

He quoted from *The Song of Songs* and the boy laughed, “Your poetry, as our master would say, smells of the lamp-oil, you know! But *you* smell of scent. It’s a scent I like, however. I noticed it at the communion table one day.”

“It’s lavender,” Georges said.

None of love’s labours which he had so patiently expended in weaving his web had been lost. And he had been delighted to have his leg pulled on the subject of his poem. It seemed to absolve him for the mystification he had been guilty of. Which was as well, for he still cherished it: unlike Lucien, Alexander had not for a moment imagined that the poem was not of his own writing, still less that the words were supposed to be spoken by a woman.

“I know your poem by heart,” the boy said, “I say it over before going to sleep at night; and in chapel, too, whenever I look at you. What’s more, the other day, in French period, we had to say a poem by Victor Hugo—‘*Mon père, ce héros*’—I was first to be questioned, and I happened to be thinking of you, and instead of saying, ‘*Mon père . . .*’, I said, ‘*Mon Bien-Aimé . . .*’. You can imagine the uproar. I got out of it by saying that I was thinking of a prayer and that those were its first words. It was true, really, wasn’t it? I could never tell an absolute lie, you know.”

He paused and then, smiling, said, “If I’d known you were coming I’d have worn my red tie. I bought it from a chap in my form, so as to have one the same colour as yours.”

“Careful!” Georges said. “Red’s the colour of fire. Aren’t you afraid of burning yourself?”

Georges’ finger-tips had found his friend’s hand, resting beside him on top of the wall.

For some moments they had been lightly stroking it, until the hand came to life, gripped his own, and, with all its strength, squeezed it.

Later, in the dormitory, Georges gave Lucien an account of his visit to the junior school playground. But in all his tales of Alexander there were certain omissions: on this occasion he left out not only the commentary on “his” versification, but likewise the hand-squeezing. Georges was unwilling to remind Lucien that something of the kind had occurred between them, during one of the Retreat sermons. Lucien said, “Did you make a date?”

“No, but I can go again in the same way. The Father didn’t see me.”

“You’re odd friends I must say! When people really love each other they’re not satisfied with a public playground as a meeting-place. I can tell you a good place where you can be alone: the conservatory on the terrace above the grotto with the big statue of St Claude. Nobody seems to know about it. André and I often went there.”

Thus it was that Georges faced the prospect of his first date—for he knew already that he would surely follow Lucien’s advice. Hitherto he had preferred not to consider the possibility: now he realised that it was imminent. He remembered the conservatory, but he had only seen it from outside. Blajan had pointed it out to him, though certainly without any idea of what use his interlocutor would put it to, or of what use Lucien had already made of it. Georges began to wonder what future the conservatory might hold for him. He kept thinking of what Lucien had just said to him and the words gave form to visions. All of which did not prevent him from being sleepy. The thoughts which filled his mind were as much at the mercy of the sandman as their predecessors of two or three years ago. He began

to dwell on that fact; and to throw light on the contrast between what he had been then and was now, he made an effort to recall what kind of thoughts had occupied him then: he had been scratched by the cat; so-and-so had cheated at marbles; the Western he was reading was absorbingly interesting; the pudding, at dinner, had been spoilt; the chamber-maid was unusually stupid—would she forget the sugar again when she brought him his breakfast in the morning?

These recollections both touched him and made him uneasy. He was still a child; yet he was already living in sacrilege, in imposture, and in a forbidden order of friendship.

Never had Georges been so impatient for high mass as he was on that first Sunday in Lent.

Lent meant no more to him than Sexagesima had done. But he had received, at early mass that same morning, a note from Alexander.

*I shall be incense-bearer at high mass. When I swing the censer towards your side, it will be for you.*

And the boy, who had just appeared in the choir among the other acolytes, seemed calm, sure of himself, strong in his secret alliance.

He had not fulfilled any ceremonial function since the beginning of term, in January. Georges compared him with those who were serving with him, and looked as if it must be him they were there to serve. Even the Superior himself, who was officiating, appeared,

standing beside Alexander, as no more than a poor devil of a priest, for whom the headmastership of this college had to pass as sufficient substitute for the episcopal crook. Whereas Alexander, did he but wish it, might become Pope. In past centuries he would have been a cardinal at fifteen, like one of those whose name had appeared in the list of the Blesséd quoted by the preacher during Retreat.



Georges remembered the day when he had seen Lucien holding the censer which Alexander now held, and swing it towards André. He had, at the time, been shocked; he was not in the least shocked now. He had matured, and it was now his turn to enjoy an impudent triumph. However, he had asked Lucien not to look during the censuring operation; he wanted it all to himself.

Alexander had swung the censer towards the Superior, then towards the nave and the junior school. He turned next towards the senior boys and, looking straight into Georges' eyes, as if there were nobody else present and his friend were sole lord and master of St Claude's, he swung the censer towards him the ritual three times. The boy's face had not changed; but Georges was glad that no eyes observed his own; he was overwhelmed. Nevertheless, he was grateful to Alexander for having been so bold; and he made up his mind to be so himself; tomorrow morning he would make a date with him to meet in the conservatory at six in the evening.

Crossing the playground, Georges kept close to the wall, to avoid being seen from the first floor. He reached the gravel path, and the conservatory itself, without let or hindrance. Lucien had been right; it was an excellent hiding-place. The tubs in which the orange-trees were planted provided so many screens. And the tiered staging on which stood plants in pots being open at one end, the space beneath it offered an accessible hiding-place in case of danger.

Georges stood near the door and kept watch. He doubted whether the thing he hoped for was possible. True, Alexander had made a sign of assent in the refectory, but he might be refused permission to leave his place in study. Or he might be under punishment. If he came, would he use the main approach, and risk being seen? Did he know about the gravel path, which was safer, but would entail making a detour?

Footsteps, from the direction of the path, set Georges' heart beating heavily. And a moment later the boy was there, light and graceful, as if he had materialised at the edge of the terrace by magic. He was as calm and natural as ever, as if his errand was simple and commonplace.

Nevertheless, no sooner was he inside the conservatory than he clambered up onto the highest of the tier of stagings, as if not yet quite willing to allow Georges near him. He must be acutely aware that this meeting was something new, a development in their friendship.

Georges followed, making his way between the pots, and sat down one stage lower, beside Alexander's legs. He could think of nothing whatever to say; any words of his would have destroyed the spell which was on them. He stared at the other boy's knees: they were starred with scars—souvenirs of a little-boyhood which, at that very moment, was developing into something new.

He rested his head on the other's knees and it seemed to him that it would be well to sleep, to die, so. His whole life had been lived for this moment. Then he raised himself so that his head lay against the younger boy's chest. That gave him a surprise: the boy's admirable calm was feigned; his heart was beating as wildly as Georges' own. There was an appeal in that which could not be resisted. Georges moved up a stage, sat close beside his

friend, then drew away a little to contemplate Alexander's face. Its beauty was a marvel; and marvels were not for kissing.

Seeing a fine gold chain about the boy's neck, Georges removed it and looked at the medallion which hung from it. Both were warm with the warmth of Alexander's body. And, as if to merge his own warmth, his own inviolable privacy, with his friend's, Georges kissed them—the chain and medallion—before returning them.

Back in his place, he found the study almost unrecognisable. Yet certainly nothing had changed: the invigilating Father was still reading some pious work; the same boy, undergoing a mild punishment, still stood in one corner of the room. To Lucien's inquiring glance, Georges replied with a smile. And later, in the course of his dormitory confidence, he said nothing of the chaste kissing of the medallion. When he came to the end of his account Lucien asked him if he had not kissed Alexander. He was too penetrating by half; but then, he had experience of these matters. Georges said, "No, I did not. It's not obligatory, I suppose?"

"You'll see for yourself. You begin with fine sentiments and end in something more substantial! Bourdaloue said something of the kind somewhere, and I remember André pressing my foot with his when that preacher mentioned it in his first talk."

Georges was disturbed by the idea that Alexander might already be what Lucien so clearly was. He had faced the fact that Alexander's innocence was probably relative; but he did not want to think the boy perverse. He wanted their friendship to remain poised between good and evil. But what strong attraction was it that drew Alexander to him? Could he be

one of those angels who are, in fact, devils? He had accepted the idea of their secret meeting very readily: too readily? And he had insisted that their next meeting must be on the day after the morrow, despite Georges' anxiety that they should not be too imprudent. Was not this impatience the measure of his precocious corruption? He was Maurice's brother, and did not Maurice find a credo in Richepin's lamentable verses?

True, until very recently, he had attended closely to his religious duties; but Georges knew precisely what such appearances were apt to conceal, at St Claude's. Had he, when serving mass in the upper chapel, been thinking of something quite other than the mass? If his piety had been authentic, would he have accepted so equivocal a near neighbourhood so soon thereafter?

Was he not, in short, like Lucien during Georges' first term? Lucien, who was a group leader in the Holy Childhood but, for all that, still linked in equivocal friendship with André. How could Georges know that Alexander did not have a special friendship in the junior school?

The question dwelt with Georges until their next meeting.

"Have you any special friend in your own part of the school?" he asked Alexander, as soon as they were together again in the conservatory. And Alexander, astonished, said that he had not.

"Nor have I, of course. You're my only great friend, but I'm very friendly with my neighbour, Lucien Rouvère, the boy who is on my left in chapel. That gives me the pleasure of being able to talk about you."

Alexander seemed stricken with amazement at this. He said, "What! You mean you talk about me?"

"Lucien is a friend."

"So you have two friends! I can have one only."

With which he took to his heels.

Georges stayed where he was, hardly able to believe what had just happened. He experienced a despair which was utterly new to him. His happiness had slipped through his fingers and he had nobody but himself to blame. His talk of alien friendships had been calculated to test Alexander, but that test had turned against himself. He had imagined the boy a hypocrite; he found his integrity all too firm. How badly he had read the Map of Love: among the places marked for avoidance, was there not "Light-mindedness"? However, as Georges made his way back to study, he tried to assure himself that the fruits of so much careful toil could surely not be lost. Besides, surely Alexander's violent reaction at least demonstrated the strength of his feeling for him, Georges.

Lucien, too, reassured him. He did not consider it possible that Alexander could be seriously angry over such a trifle: and since, according to dramatic classics, every love, every friendship, has a confidant, he, Lucien, would see the boy and explain. He would tell him that he, too, had a real, a very great friend, from whom he was parted but whom nobody could ever replace. Georges declined Lucien's good offices; he had had quite enough of bringing Lucien into his friendship with Alexander.

At mass the next morning the boy was as neat and shining as usual, even, indeed, rather more carefully brushed and combed; but not once did he look directly at Georges. Had he

not turned over the pages rather too quickly, indeed, one might have supposed him to be reading his book. Moving up to take communion, he deliberately hung back, so that neither Georges nor Lucien would be next to him. This attitude he persisted in during the days which followed.

A sorrowful Sunday indeed! During the high mass Georges recalled the last Sunday, when the boy who was now avoiding him had deliberately swung the censer towards him. Later, in the refectory, the list of names read out included that which, having formerly delighted him with its exquisite sound, now pierced his heart.

Vespers brought a brief moment of relief. Alexander was flaunting a red tie, which he had not been wearing that morning: he must have changed it during the lunch hour. But that, no doubt, was simply to satisfy a whim: it was not even a gesture of irony, for he showed not a sign of interest in Georges—for all he had bought the tie in his honour.

The rest of the week passed equally dismally. One morning, with a view to trying the effect of absence, Georges pretended to be unwell and stayed in bed until lunch-time. At lunch he saw Alexander glance once, quickly, towards his place. That seemed to him a good sign: the other was keeping an eye on him, albeit furtively. But before chancing a personal approach, Georges wanted to make sure that Alexander was undeceived in the matter of Lucien. He therefore revoked his earlier decision and called upon the unwitting author of their quarrel to help him.

Lucien, resuming for the purpose a role which he had given up at the beginning of the term, made his way into the junior school on the business of the Living Rosary. He

succeeded in meeting Alexander and even in getting him alone and telling him that he wanted a word with him. But the boy walked off before he could get any further. Lucien tried again on the following day, this time arming himself with the bulletin of the Holy Childhood; by way of opening the conversation he recommended the article entitled “The Souls of Malay Children” as a result of which he had to be satisfied with his interlocutor’s answer to the effect that he was interested only in those of Chinese children.

In Latin, during that part of the term, Georges’ class was doing the *Bucolics*; that day they had reached the second eclogue, entitled *Alexis*. There was a footnote explaining that this Alexis was a young slave who had been given to the poet and that his real name was Alexander.

*Le Tatou* began the reading in an off-hand tone; the class smiled at the tenderer passages.

Georges had not forgotten the emotion which he had experienced on reading the account of the deaths of Nisus and Euryale, • after his first meeting with Alexander. And now here, once again, he was meeting the tale of his own feelings in Virgil: the poet’s affection, and Alexis’ cruelties—these were his own case.

During study he went on to translate the last verses in order to discover what all this came to. He was extremely shocked by the poet’s advice to choose another Alexis. His own heart, he felt, was far from being a Roman one.

Night brought him closer to Alexander. With his head under the sheets he re-read, by the light of an electric torch, the two notes he had had from Alexander and which he would not have exchanged for anything in the world. He cherished them not only for their words, which were, indeed, but few, but in all the details of presentation and caligraphy. It seemed to him

that between the lines and behind each word he could see the face which had bent over them as they were written, and the hand which had written them. He hoped that this nocturnal liturgy would have all the power of an incantation. For did not a god—Thespis' Love—preside over it? The god's picture, kept close with the two notes, denied that all was dust and proclaimed the excellence of having faith in life. Georges' and Alexander's friendship would be saved by their beauty, as the statue had been.

One afternoon, Georges, happening to glance at his calendar, saw—and was dazzled by the vision—that this very day, Saturday, March 18th, was St Alexander's day. Only that chance look had revealed it to him: during meditation the Superior had announced the day belonging to St Cyril, Bishop and Martyr. As in the case of St Lucien, martyrology and secular calendar were not in step—in the martyrology St Alexander's day was May 3rd. Georges determined to see, in that fortunate glance at the calendar, a promise of forgiveness: first the pagan god, and now the Christian saint, had declared themselves his allies.

His idea was to send the boy a note by a way which was open to him—he would put it into Alexander's drawer in the refectory. After two or three false starts—Georges had lost some of his facility with the pen—he wrote:

*Alexander,*

*Here are my best wishes for your name day, accompanied by a gift whose modesty you will forgive. Will you allow me to tell you, again, that I love you and to swear that I do and shall love only you. You have become my whole life.*

The modest gift was a flask of lavender water which Georges had just received. During his parents' last visit he had asked them for this, wishing to give it to Alexander who had said that he liked the scent. The flask had arrived exactly at the right moment.

The refectory was deserted. Georges went to Alexander's place and opened the drawer. He saw the boy's initials engraved on his napkin ring: "A. M."—the first letters of *Amitié* and *Amour*. He put the flask of lavender water, and the note, under the napkin. He was moved by the mere handling of Alexander's things, Alexander's drawer.

Georges watched closely at dinner-time: the boy looked surprised, then slipped the note into his pocket. Before leaving the refectory he also put the flask into his pocket. And although he did not look at him Georges had a feeling that his cause had triumphed.

The next morning, coming into chapel, Alexander smiled at him; and Georges would have given up even his two notes for that smile. Once again they stood side by side at the holy table. The boy reeked of lavender water. And he whispered to Georges, "This evening at six."

What a difference, once again, between one Sunday and another! It was raining but for Georges this was a finer day than last Sunday, when the sun had been shining. Indifferent to a very poor mark for the week's test—a science subject—he hurried away to the conservatory. Alexander said:

"When I realised you had not kept our secret and that you had a friend already, I hated you. Then, afterwards, I saw that it didn't matter, that there is more than one kind of friendship. But I wanted to wait and see what you'd do, and anyway I didn't see what there

was that I could do. Didn't you guess, when you saw my red tie last Sunday? I didn't wear it in the morning—deliberately; but then I thought that was being sly and unkind, so I changed. But somehow I couldn't meet your eyes. I was ashamed of our quarrel. And all the time I was thinking of you and being more fond of you than ever.”

Georges put his arm round Alexander's neck. There, it was done; he had not been afraid of kissing him; but Alexander had blushed and he had not returned his kiss.

“You'd forgotten—fortunately, as it happens—that on Sundays I'm not in study at this time. To get here I had to ask permission to leave in the middle of an Academy session. The Superior must have thought me very ill indeed! When I left they were discussing the Great Dauphin. But I prefer my own little dauphin.” And, smiling, he added, “You're no longer jealous of Lucien Rouvère?”

“Only of you!”

“By the way, what is your birthday? Luckily I noticed, in time, that it was your name day; but I should hate to miss your birthday.”

“September 11th.”

“Mine's July 16th. Our months aren't the same, but at least our seasons are—we both belong to summer. And to spring—St Alexander's day is more or less the beginning of spring, and St Georges' is April 23rd.”

They made for the door. Georges turned from it, however, lingering in the conservatory, reluctant to tear himself away from it.



“How good the orange-trees smell!” he said. “The scent is for you—for your spring.”

The boy suddenly kissed him, as lightly and swiftly as if it were meant to pass unnoticed, and said, smiling, “There’s for my spring.”

Georges was back in his place at the Academy. The Superior was declaiming the funeral oration—they were getting near to the end of it. “*Ah, modération de Cornet, tu dois bien confondre cette jeunesse aveuglée! . . .*” Georges studied his fellow academicians: there was one who kept removing his glasses to polish the lenses; another had trumpet-shaped ears; yet another, a Philosophy-class man, never stopped twisting the signet-ring he wore on his finger. Doubtless he was right to be proud of it: only a philosopher, a blood, would dare to wear a ring at St Claude’s.

Later, arriving at the Congregation meeting, Georges looked across at Alexander. The boy sat gravely on his bench. He acknowledged Georges’ look with a scarcely perceptible smile. Tomorrow being St Joseph’s day, Father Lauzon talked about St Joseph.

At dinner Georges found a note from Alexander in his drawer. Alexander must have put it there, as a surprise for him, when he came back from the conservatory. Georges opened it: it contained a lock of fair hair stuck to a small piece of gummed paper, and beneath it these words were written:

*For Georges, in memory of my first real name-day and of our great reconciliation—*

*this lock of my hair (scented).*

Later, when he was in bed, Georges held this note in his hand and inhaled its faint perfume. And having again taken delight in its message, he began to question himself concerning the day's principal event. The truth, which he had perceived but not faced, now appeared to him with startling clarity: he and Alexander were at the cross-roads of the fable, between Vice and Virtue. The choice was theirs and for a brief while Georges hung undecided between those two extremes. A strange phrase from that mortally tedious funeral oration recurred to him, in which were mentioned those "honourable pretensions in dishonourable engagements", to avoid the dangers of which, said the Grand Master of the College de Navarre, "neither steel nor fire" must be spared. They were the dangers with which Georges was now confronted.

His responsibility disturbed him. It was he who, patiently and unscrupulously, had drawn Alexander into breaking the college rule. The least he could do was to respect the boy's integrity. André had, it was true, not done so in his relations with Lucien; but he had the excuse that he was dealing with an equal, since they were both in senior school.

Georges had picked upon one of those boys who, being in junior school, were, doubtless for excellent reasons, kept apart from their elders. The meeting of seniors and juniors at the holy table had a religious intention: he had turned it into sacrilege. For more than a term Alexander had lived at peace among boys of his own age and division of the school, attending the services, hearing sermons, busy with his work. He had carried the consecrated lamb, and for a whole month had served mass. A year ago that day he had probably been

praying to St Joseph; today he had kept an assignation in a conservatory. Being kissed, he had blushed; yet within a few minutes he had returned the kiss and had not blushed. His *pudor* had born witness to his innocence; the facility with which he overcame it, to his sensitivity to example.

Georges was, then, unquestionably the cause of the younger boy's dawning confusion; yet before whom must he plead guilty? Alexander and he had the right to judge themselves, and for themselves. And since they were happy, what use was this superfluous remorse? The boy had inspired this friendship and had, by his acts, proved that having inspired it he found it to his taste. Let him decide, then, if it was to maintain its idealism in expression or, rather, to take a different form. Georges would leave it to Alexander to complete, to his own taste, the work which he had begun.

Nevertheless, in order to keep himself from being carried away beyond his intention, he thought it advisable to make their meetings less frequent. Using the pretext that he had to work at his academic speech, he cancelled the assignment fixed for Tuesday, putting it back to Friday. *Friday is our day*, he wrote.

Maurice was very pleased with himself. Surrounded by a small group of cronies, he was telling them how, by suborning one of the college servants, he had contrived to receive a letter from his sweetheart. For the benefit of such of his friends as might be interested, he told them the amount of the bribe he had had to pay. There was, he said, laughing, something peculiarly appropriate in employing a college servant, since his sweetheart was his mother's chamber-maid. He went on to speak freely of the pleasures which this young person enabled him to enjoy. Riche-pin was nothing to this.

The matter, Maurice was saying, was not altogether simple, since he shared a room with his brother; he had to take advantage of the times when he was alone; in any case, a spice of danger made the business all the more enjoyable.

Georges, listening to these stories, felt sickened. These tales were worse than Lucien's, unsuited to their age, to their condition as schoolboys; and Alexander's name was, by a sort of profanation, involved in them. How little did Maurice resemble his brother! His dull eyes, cheeks coarsely red, and the hair which grew so low over his forehead, spoke of earthy passions as clearly as did his words. The impurity of his budding manhood was a corrective, for Georges, to Lucien's influence. It made him realise what purity meant, and it made Alexander's purity all the dearer to him.

The boy had burst in, running, and Georges closed the door of the conservatory after him. Alexander said, "It isn't easy for me to get away from Father Lauzon. I forgot to tell you that I go to confession in his room, on Fridays, instead of in chapel, with the others, on Saturdays. As a rule he comes to fetch me at about six. So, because of our rendezvous, I had to use my wits and go to him a bit earlier. You came right in the middle of confession, as I came right in the middle of your Academy session, last Sunday. There's always a conversation after confession. But when I saw by the clock on the table that it was already six, I said I had some school work to do and was in a hurry, and here I am."

"So I succeed to confession! It wanted only that! We shall have had all the sacraments in common. We're like people in the *grand siècle* that they're always dinning into our ears—carrying on their religious life and their love life at the same time. Our confessor absolves

you one day and me the next without even noticing that each of us is telling him of the other—albeit obscurely—and that he is smelling the same scent on both of us.” “You know, the Father may not be quite as stupid as you make out.”

“What do you mean?”

Alexander stooped to smell first one orange blossom, then another. He took voluptuous pleasure in their scent, but at the same time he seemed to be playing for time before answering. When he stood up he had pollen on his nose. As soon as Georges had wiped it off, he climbed up the tier of staging, as he had done at their first meeting, but seeing his friend about to follow him, he said, “No, you stay down there. I’d rather you were not near me while I say what I have to say.”

Georges leant against one of the orange-tree tubs and, chewing a leaf, said, “I’m listening.”

“Father Lauzon has just told me that he’s noticed a slight change in me, that he is worried about me, and that he is aware, when I am with him, of something—questionable. No—it’s not our lavender water, I don’t use any when I’m going to see him. He made me sit on his knee and talked to me confidentially. He asked me whether I was not harassed by something, dreams at night perhaps—whether, at all events, I was not hiding something from him. I looked him so straight in the eyes that he didn’t insist—I’d already done the same thing when he used the words ‘Something questionable’. So he confined himself to giving me two pieces of advice: the first was to remain exactly what I am—I almost thanked him for you!—the other was to read, every day, in the missal, the ‘Prayer for driving away evil thoughts’. He said that if, by the Grace of God, I had not yet had such thoughts, this would prevent me from

having any.”

Georges was familiar with this prayer. He had read it one day, during Retreat, in order to drive away the evil thoughts which Lucien inspired in him. And now here was a priest recommending the same prayer to Alexander, as if he had guessed at the danger which was threatening him; the prayer against evil thoughts had become the prayer against Georges.

For a brief while both boys remained silent and thoughtful. The evening was a dark one. Alexander, almost invisible on the highest staging, said, “Georges, do you know the things we are not supposed to know?”

“Yes, I know them.”

“Do they interest you?”

This he had said in a very grave manner. Was this gravity a sign of acceptance, as the gravity of his look had been on the day he visited the senior school playground? What was this twelve-year-old afraid of—or desirous of? Was he about to admit, to Georges, things he had refused to admit to Father Lauzon? The shades of Lucien and André, once frequenters of this same scene, seemed to move and hover in the twilight. Was the irrevocable destined to happen? Georges remembered his resolutions, and his feelings of disgust. In the same grave tone as Alexander’s he said, “No, those things don’t interest me.”

Alexander came lightly down the tier of staging. His face seemed to glow with a kind of light as he came near to Georges. He said, “How glad I am! You have reassured me. For all I was fond of you I couldn’t help wondering what you wanted of me. I was afraid it might be something bad.”

Georges sat with all the other academicians, in the very front row of chairs in the assembly room, in front even of the masters, and not far from the Cardinal who had come to preside over this solemn ceremony. Seated in his green plush armchair and holding his head as high as possible so that Alexander could see him, Georges thought of the note he had managed to pass to his friend during communion.

*Presently, when you hear my tedious words, think of them changed into caresses for you.*

His parents were present at the ceremony; he had had the honour of being introduced by them to His Eminence, whom they knew.

The Superior opened the ball; he had not gone up onto the platform, being, perhaps, unwilling to look down on the Cardinal, who, as it was, looked hunched and dwarfish in his scarlet robes. Instead he had simply risen in his place and turned towards His Eminence: he said,

“My boys, may your memory of St Claude’s be something more than its admirable setting of green hills, the sweet curve of the valley, and the sunny hill crowned by this our home. More, too, than fecund labour in the peace of our solitude, the religious exercises in which your youthful piety finds expression, and the devoted masters who lavish their care and learning upon you. Over and above these diverse memories you must, in addition, retain that of the august prelate who has come here to smile upon your boyhood.”

At which His Eminence nodded approvingly, as if he were a member of St Claude’s

Academy replying to the Superior's eternal, "Is it not so, gentlemen?"

In conclusion the Superior explained the meaning of the day's event: "The Church," he said, "allows us to enjoy such innocent pleasures, on this Sunday of 'Lætare', when the Church herself, in her liturgy, puts off the violet colour of Lent, and puts on pink in its stead." Georges was, clearly, not alone in his interest in colours: it occurred to him to wonder what he would have had to say not of the significance of the Cardinal's red robes, but of that same colour's significance in the neck-ties of two among his alumni, one of them a member of his Academy.

A member of the Rhetoric form then spoke a commentary, half-serious and half-playful, on the Bishop of Meaux's *Meditation upon Silence*. Georges was not unaware of the fact that the Superior had rewritten this boy's speech for him, as, indeed, he had rewritten all the others. This, in the case of his own speech, had, it is true, not surprised him: the Hotel de Rambouillet had left him cold. The Map of Love had, certainly, suggested a number of sallies which Georges had thought witty: the Superior had deleted them. For the rest, almost nothing was left of the original oration, and Georges had been put to no more trouble than that of copying out the amended text. Under various names, then, the Superior was the sole orator of the day. But then who else could have been half so eloquent on the subject of the *Grand Siècle*, as eloquent as the Bishop of Meaux discoursing on Silence, and on the fact that Jesus had spoken but once in the course of His childhood, when he instructed the doctors.

But it was time for M. l'Académicien of the third form to take his turn: Georges installed himself behind the table on the platform: but it was neither for His Eminence, nor for his

parents, that he struck a noble attitude and took great pains with his diction.

On the following morning the senior boys were first into chapel. When the junior school filed in, Alexander broke ranks and went to kneel, in isolation, in the middle of the choir.

Such a punishment was so extraordinary that it had only been inflicted two or three times since the beginning of the year.

Georges contemplated this spectacle. At first he affected to be amused by it, as if it were a joke which Alexander was playing on him. He admired the boy's grace, calm, and proud bearing. He, too, was proud, for this was his friend. It seemed to him as if Alexander had been so placed only that all might see him better, better even than when he had appeared there to serve the mass. But after having allowed this fiction to hold his attention for several minutes, he was forced to fall back upon the real facts: Alexander was undergoing punishment, was exposed to the general reprobation, and that on the morrow of the day when Georges had so brilliantly distinguished himself as an orator.

Georges hoped that Alexander, to whom he had dedicated yesterday's honours, had felt that he shared them and that this would be some comfort to him still. Nevertheless, he reproached himself with them; he would have liked to be suffering humiliation at his friend's side. It occurred to him that the long kneeling on bare marble must be painful to the boy's knees; and wishing to make some gesture, however futile, of solidarity, he removed the small rug from beneath his own.

But what on earth could Alexander have done? Above all, in the upper chapel, Father Lauzon, turning round for the blessing, must be looking down upon his former acolyte in that

disgraceful posture. Must he not be thinking, once again, that Alexander had changed a great deal? Suddenly, an idea flashed through Georges' mind: their friendship was the cause of this sanction against the boy. And yet, no, that was hardly possible; both would have been confronted with it and with each other, and both punished.

When Georges moved forward to kneel for communion, Alexander calmly rose and came to kneel beside him, in his usual place, his hands demurely clasped. He whispered, "This evening. Six o'clock." This was the same formula as that he had used on the day of their reconciliation, but now it had, for Georges, a very different sound: there could now be no question of it, Alexander's punishment had a bearing on their friendship. Had this not been so, would he have brought forward their next meeting which had been fixed for Friday, like the last? Yesterday's note had, perhaps, been seized? The hour of André's vengeance had come.

During each study period throughout the day Georges sat in some anxiety, expecting the Father Prefect to appear and summon him. He was quite sure that Alexander would have admitted nothing, but the note was signed *Georges*. No doubt inquiries concerning all the Georges in the college were going forward, in which case it was only a matter of time. If only the truth were not discovered before six o'clock! Georges was ready to face anything—provided it was after his meeting with Alexander. He had chosen, from among the small presents he had received on yesterdays' great occasion, a small box of chocolate croquettes to give Alexander.

Permission to leave the room he received as a victory, but acute anxiety returned as he stood on watch by the door of the conservatory. He was afraid that Alexander would not be

able to come, and was even more relieved than he had been on the first occasion when he recognised the sound of his footsteps on the path.

He found that he had guessed right in so far as a note was, indeed, the cause of the trouble. But not his note; a note which Alexander had written. The boy poured out his tale of woe with febrile volubility.

On the previous evening, during study, he had decided to reply to Georges' note; the Father Prefect of the junior school had come in silently and had confiscated his letter, which fortunately had not been addressed to anyone by name. In the course of the subsequent interview in private Alexander had been ordered to denounce his correspondent, but refused to do so. He had then been deprived of dessert at dinner, made to kneel for an hour beside his bed, and warned that if he did not admit everything before the morrow's mass he would be made to kneel in penance in the middle of the choir. In the morning the Father Prefect had stationed himself at the door of the chapel to watch Alexander go, with an air of indifference, to the performance of this penance.

During the first study period the Prefect had again sent for him. He had, on his desk, notes for the admonition he then delivered; Alexander was able to read these heads, upside down—Pride, Indiscipline, Irreligion, Moral Turpitude. The Prefect had, as it were, a Map of Love, after his fashion. But it had got him nowhere.

In despair, he had haled Alexander before the Supreme Court—the Superior. He, in his turn, had tried everything, first to soften the culprit by reminding him that he was a Child of Mary; then to trap him by telling him that his accomplice was known, but that they wanted his own confession; finally, to frighten him. Alexander was, in fact, told that since that was

his attitude, his parents would be asked not to let him return to school after the next vacation; meanwhile he would do the same penance every morning.

“I don’t care a bit about the penance,” the boy said, “but if I’m expelled, you’ll come too, wherever I go, won’t you?”

“Yes,” Georges said.

“We’ll go, together, to another college. Swear.”

“I swear.”

Alexander took his hand and squeezed it. He had really lost his calm serenity this time, more so than at their first secret encounter. He had, as it were, used all his provision of self-control elsewhere; he was quivering with excitement.

“To think,” he exclaimed, “that these men, who are paid by us, should try to stop us doing as we like when we’re not doing anything wrong! Because *they* call our pleasure moral turpitude, they think they’ve the right to deprive us of it! Well, let them try searching me for notes, that’s all! I shall fight and scratch and bite!”

As if to take the boy’s mind off this business for a moment, Georges took the box of chocolates out of his pocket and gave it to him: they both ate several and then Georges said, “You haven’t mentioned Father Lauzon.”

“I’m not much concerned about him. Naturally, he was involved. I’ve had a long private talk with him, by way of compensation for keeping my mouth shut with the others. I had a good reason for that: it was during the morning he sent for me. As I didn’t know if they’d let me leave the room at all during evening study, I told him I wanted to talk to him this evening. Then I managed to keep the conversation going until just on six o’clock, as I did the other

time, after confession. At the same time I managed to get my work done first—though a bit rough and readily. I'm being careful to learn my lessons more carefully than usual, and as it turned out, I was right—I've been picked on with questions in every class: they're putting me in the pillory.

“To get back to Father Lauzon, he reproached me for, as he said, ‘incomplete confessions’, on the grounds that I was engaged in ‘a culpable intrigue of which he knew nothing’—his own words, not mine. He seemed positively jealous. I told him that I did not, in my soul and conscience, feel myself in any way ‘culpable’, since the ‘intrigue’ in question was in no way culpable, and that consequently I had seen no need to mention it. His answer was that, in default of any graver sin, I had at least committed that of disobedience since I was breaking rules; and that I was in open revolt against my masters, my parents, God, *et vitam aeternam, Amen*. He claims that I am a great sinner, a stumbling-block. He actually threatened to forbid me communion but I stopped that: I told him I would write to the Cardinal, and even to the Pope.”

“I'm going to try to think what we had better do,” Georges said, “and I'll let you know by leaving a note for you in the refectory as usual. At all events, you can rely on me: whatever I decide, trust me. It may be that we shall not be able to see each other for some time; never mind—remember that I have uttered —here and now and in your presence—the words used by the young men of Athens: ‘I shall never abandon my comrade in battle.’”

Alexander leaned his head on Georges' shoulder, and, assuming a wheedling tone which was not at all his normal way, said, “You haven't asked me what I'd written in my note, and I nearly forgot to tell you:

*If your words were caresses, my glances were kisses . . .”*

He smiled, as if he had said something malicious; and fled.

When Georges returned to the study the master in charge cast him a questioning look and pointed to the corner nearest to the master’s own desk. For a moment he thought that this punishment was connected with the matter of Alexander, but he was almost immediately reassured: the Father pointed to the clock, indicating that he seemed to have overlooked the time. He had left the room on the pretext that he had a headache, but this excuse had its limits. Would Alexander be punished for this too?

Standing with crossed arms and facing the wall, Georges could hear the sounds of the study going on behind him: books or desks closing, a ruler falling to the floor, pens tapping as they were dipped into ink-wells, and the scratching of pens on paper. Most of the other boys were certainly delighted to see him stuck out there, for he had never yet been punished. But had any of them ever been punished in an affair which came near to involving a letter to the Pope?

Georges thought of Lucien, who alone would be feeling sorry for him and who, alone, was in possession of his secret. Doubtless his imagination, bless him, had been at work to explain so long an absence. Doubtless, too, he had spent the time in copying Georges’ Latin exercise. Since he never believed that the worst would happen—he had, characteristically, spent the day trying to reassure Georges—he had probably supposed that the conservatory

frequenters had had more to say to each other than his friend would ever be persuaded to admit.

Georges dwelt with awe upon the play of destiny. Here was he in the same situation with Alexander as Lucien had, through Georges' fault, been in with André. One of the two friends—but in this case the youngest—was in trouble because of the other; that other spared, thanks to the absence of his name on the compromising letter. However, the minor punishment which Georges was undergoing proclaimed the fact that the inequity of their respective lots—his and Alexander's—was already being rectified at his expense. This, perhaps, was only the beginning. On the other hand, what evidence of strength Alexander had given in coping with his situation! He had outfaced the Prefect, the Superior and Father Lauzon; he had despised the annoyances, threats, tasks with which they had plagued him, got through his work, learned his lessons, and turned up punctually to keep their assignation.

He, Georges, must not fall below the standard set by such examples. Georges was forming a resolve which would be worthy of them: he would give himself up in order to exculpate Alexander. And exculpate himself by reducing the whole adventure to a childish game. If this did not please Alexander's taste, and offended his fighting spirit, it could not be helped. Georges was the elder and would be the more rational. The prospect of having to leave St Claude's, as he had promised to do if things went from bad to worse, did not trouble him; but it seemed to him natural to make an effort to avoid this by coming to some other arrangement if it could be done.

He would go and see Father Lauzon, obtain his forgiveness, and then his support. Father Lauzon did not distrust him. (He would have been more reserved with Marc, who was not in

the Congregation.) Moreover, he would be predisposed by his own wish to believe in Alexander's virtue. For could the priest really admit that the heart of his young favourite was closed to him? Besides, since the boy's heart had, in fact, remained pure, the very power of that purity would be their defence. But it was not enough to win their case; they must win it quickly.

Georges could not bear the idea of Alexander still being kept on his knees in the chapel choir the next morning, exposed to humiliation as no other pupil of the college had ever been. He would beg Father Lauzon to intercede at once, this very evening, with the Superior, to have the punishment cancelled. What a surprise that would be for Alexander! He would surely be forced to welcome his friend's indiscretion more favourably this time.

Meanwhile, however, his watch, in agreement with the clock, showed the time to be a quarter to seven. It would soon be time for religious reading, then dinner, then bed, and it would be impossible to do any more today.

The bell released him, and Georges was able to return to his place. When he saw the Superior come in, he had a new idea: Why not approach him directly? Was it not better to address oneself directly to God than to His saints? That, in any case, was the only chance of arranging the matter without delay. But when would it be feasible? After the reading, during the few minutes before the evening meal? Or later, after dinner? In either case the Superior would tell him to leave whatever it was until tomorrow—after meditation and mass. No, he would have to have recourse to cunning, almost to force, in order to get an audience that night.

Georges was watching the Superior's face. He was looking at the man who, hitherto, had

done the religious reading every evening, directed the school's meditation every morning and then celebrated the public mass; who asked the blessing and said grace at meals, read out the month's marks in study, and the places for the week's composition every Sunday; who declaimed Bossuet, wrote sonnets and the academicians' speeches, had talked to Georges of the *Collegium Tarsicii*, and had lent him books on classical antiquity. This same man would shortly be made aware for whom it was that Alexander Motier turned glances into kisses, for whom Georges de Sarre changed words into caresses—the Superior's own speech, delivered by Georges, on the Hotel de Rambouillet, turned into a caress! And the muse in all her glory turned into Richepin's Muse! On the whole, Georges felt not without a certain vanity; he would be revealing himself to his masters as their most charming pupil's friend.

He had, at first, experienced a feeling of pride in his courageous impulse. But, listening to the Superior, he could not avoid the thought that this man was almost too easy to deceive. From meditation to religious reading, from morning to night, he, and the likes of him, existed only to be deceived. But this was true in particular of the Superior, for in him the apostolate was tireless. The thoughts and feelings of all the boys he thought he knew and understood were as hidden from him as their acts. At that very moment, for example, everyone seemed to be attending to his reading of Bossuet's *Petit Careme* which, he had explained, is preferable to Massillon's. But Maurice must be thinking of his pretty house-maid, there were others who, like Marc de Blajan formerly, would be thinking of pretty cousins; while those whom that same Blajan had stigmatised as "evil companions" were surely thinking of their accomplices. The words of the *Petit Careme* were sounding in a wilderness. And Georges, too, would shortly be deceiving the Superior with false words; but he would be persuaded

to accept them as truths.

Lucien, apprised of Georges' plan during dinner—happily there was *Deo gratias*—approved of it.

“Had I been able to save André,” he said, “I should have stopped at nothing.”

He helped Georges to concoct his story. They were at once serious and hilarious. The interests at stake were too important not to be taken seriously; but Lucien assured Georges that he envied him the honour of the impromptu visit in prospect. It would have amused him to see the Superior *en negligé*. Would he be wearing a dressing-gown and so showing his scapulars, like Lucien himself in the past? And the sachets of camphor which, it was said, priests wore to keep their virtue?

Up in the dormitory the two friends kept a vigil of arms. As soon as the dormitory abbe was in bed, Lucien said, “Good luck, old man. I shan't go to sleep till you come back.”

Georges got quietly out of bed and put on his clothes again. Remembering what Alexander had said about what he would do if he were searched for notes, he took the precaution of leaving his in a safe place; he took them out of his wallet and locked them up in his locker. He picked up his electric torch, shook hands with Lucien and left the dormitory on tip-toes.

Once out in the corridor the risks he was running became suddenly apparent. It was like the day when he had set out to denounce André, but denouncing himself was a more serious matter. He was surprised that Lucien had not tried to dissuade him from the undertaking and was almost ready to believe that his former victim's friend had held his peace in some obscure instinct of revenge. The least he had to fear was, surely, that his untimely

disturbance of the Superior would turn him hostile. Still, the Superior would hardly be in bed at half-past nine. Perhaps he was polishing his bucolic sonnets or preparing his commentary on the *Petit Carême* for the following day. In any case, Georges had decided that if no light were showing under the study door, or if he could hear voices indicating that one of the masters was there, he would return to the dormitory as discreetly as he had left it.

Once in the ante-room he was able to confirm that the Superior was in his room, and alone. The statue of St Tarsicius, revealed by his torch, reminded him of his October visit. Today his intentions were more honourable, perhaps redeeming those with which he had come this way on that other occasion. Appearing, in his turn, before the same judge, he owed it to himself to be at least as firm as André. He was no longer apprehensive. He experienced, in advance, the pleasure of feigning confessions in order to rehabilitate a lie; he would be sacrificing the shadow to preserve the substance.

The Superior, in his ordinary clothes, was sitting under a standard lamp. He did, certainly, appear very surprised on seeing who it was he had bidden to "Come in".

"Forgive me, M. le Supérieur," Georges said. "I left the dormitory without permission, but I could not sleep for thinking that another boy was being punished for my fault."

The Superior pointed to a chair, and having rearranged his shawl with a majestic motion, closed the book on his knees. The self-accusing Georges did not take his seat in the armchair indicated by the Superior with the confident ease of academician Georges of a Sunday evening. As on that evening when he had failed to betray André, he kept his eyes lowered. But on this occasion his modesty was only an appearance designed to colour what he had to say.

He told the story which had been perfected, with Lucien's help, during dinner. Alexander and he, he said, had first become acquainted through Maurice, one Sunday, in the senior school playground. They had chatted and Alexander had expressed a wish to become an academician. Georges, by way of a joke, had offered him his patronage. Speaking of his forthcoming public oration—last Tuesday's event—he had said that he proposed to read his speech in his most "caressing voice", an expression which had given rise to a number of witticisms. Since then they had met only once, by accident, outside Father Lauzon's room, he being their confessor.

Georges himself was surprised at the calm with which he spoke. It increased his self-confidence. He was ready to face the Superior's eyes now; indeed, he would have defied interrogation under torture in the ancient manner. He was not far from believing in his story himself.

The Superior kept his eyes fixed on the cover of his book—a volume of Jules Lemaitre's *Impressions de Theatre*. Was he going to quote Nicholas Cornet? Slowly, and without raising his eyes, he asked Georges, "How did Motier minor inform you of what had happened?"

"Through Lucien Rouvère, who knows him, both being members of the Holy Childhood; they met, providentially, in the corridor this evening. Rouvère passed his message on to me at dinner, taking advantage of the *Deo Gratias*."

"What exactly did he tell you?"

"That Alexander Motier had had the idea of playing a sort of joke on me, in writing, about my use of the term 'caressing voice', but that he had been caught doing it, and was

being punished because, naturally, he refused to involve me in the matter.”

The Superior looked at Georges and said, “He consented to at least one admission—that he had already sent other notes to his distinguished correspondent. I have no wish to read them excepting in so far as you are concerned, for, from what little I have seen of it, the style is deplorable: it appears to be modelled on that of a cheap novelette. Come now, if you please—let me see your wallet.”

“But I have never received a note of any kind from Motier minor!”

“In that case he was lying. However, that is beside the point. I like, when the occasion presents itself, to see the kind of things my pupils keep in their wallets.”

Georges had flushed, but not for shame: he had experienced a wave of joyful relief at the thought of the precaution he had taken. Thus was he revenged on the Superior, who had lied in accusing Alexander of a lie; *his* lies, however, probably had a different name—“direction of intentions”, perhaps.

The Superior must have noticed his visitor’s emotion; he said, “Do not take offence at my request. It is my duty to prove to you that a boy of your age should have no secrets.”

Georges offered him his bulging wallet. The priest opened it carefully, as if a large sum of money or documents of overwhelming evidence were apt to fall out of it. The first pocket into which he pried was that from which Alexander’s notes had been removed a few minutes ago. But Georges, in order not to leave it quite empty, had left the picture postcard of the Thespi Cupid in its place. The Superior took it out and looked at it.

“The statue is by Praxiteles,” Georges said, “and is now in the Vatican. There was something about it in the *Mythology* which you lent me.”

Without making any answer the Superior replaced the Thespis Cupid in Georges' wallet.

The other pockets gave up a variety of papers: a schoolboy's identity card of the previous year, a current membership card of the "Colonial and Maritime League", an illustration from a motor-car advertisement, a table of pharmaceutical weights, a travel brochure, and the "Prayer to the guardian angel of an absent child".

"This prayer," the Superior said, "carries forty days' indulgences."

There was also one of his parents' visiting-cards, with their title—*Marquis* and *Marquise*. It made a good impression. The next thing the Superior examined was a photograph of a chateau.

"That's our place," Georges said, adding, with a smile, "I seem to be explaining everything."

He was not sorry to be able to remind the Superior of his rank. True, the Superior was of noble blood; but that did not mean that *his* parents had owned a chateau. The Superior came to the last pocket: it contained a note—but it was a banknote; and a photograph—the photograph of Anatole France.

"You are aware," said the Superior, returning the wallet to Georges, "that this author's works are on the *Index*?"

"I have only read his *Le Livre de mon ami*; I cut that picture out of it."

"Read nothing else of his—ever! And, come to think of it, you had better give me that photograph. And the other, the statue; they are hardly in the proper place in a Child of Mary's wallet."

Georges took them out of his wallet and gave them to him. The Superior held them

together in one hand and considered them, as if they were playing-cards. But, as if wishing to demonstrate his respect for both antiquity and the Vatican, he returned the picture of the statue to Georges, with a generous sweep of his arm. Then, with a sharp gesture, he tore Anatole France into four pieces and threw them into the waste-paper-basket. One piece fluttered onto the carpet; it showed no more than the beard of the illustrious academician on whose head the Director of St Claude's Academy had just done summary execution. Then the Superior said:

“Good! I see that you have told me the truth, and shall waive condemnation, but I hope that you have learnt your lesson. Choose your friends only among your class-mates. That is the best way of avoiding complications which, even though they may not be particularly serious, are at least ridiculous. You would be very embarrassed if I were to tell you the terms in which this urchin was writing to you. Boyish imaginations are apt to run away with their owners. Consequently it is important to leave them undisturbed. You already have a friend in Lucien Rouvère: stick to him, he is reliable and a model of sound common sense.

“I may say that I congratulate you on the scrupulousness which brought you to me. Nevertheless, you came without permission and discipline must be respected; I shall have to punish you—you will be gated throughout next Sunday.”

Out in the corridor once again, Georges felt gay and lighthearted. The Superior's most recent sonnet came to mind,

*J'aime les larges soirs, soirs immensément doux.*

He burst out laughing. He said over, aloud, a line from the fabulist which the Superior had quoted by way of poetic reference:

*Jours devenus moments, moments filés de soie!*

As he went, Georges used his torch to throw mocking shadows on the portraits of old boys. Even though Alexander were punished again the next morning, and though himself must suffer punishment on Sunday, they were, nevertheless, out of the wood. Alexander, despite the obstinacy which had spoiled his case, could no longer be under suspicion. His attitude would be attributed to the haughtiness of his character, and not to the weightiness of his secret. True, they had yet to devise a safe means of resuming their meetings, but after the victory just won they were surely free to hope for the best. The picture of Love, saved by a miracle, was a token of their friendship saved.

Georges made his way silently into the dormitory. He did not want to wake Lucien who, like the apostle on the Mount of Olives, had fallen asleep. Dear Lucien! He had, as it were, wanted to show Georges that he *was*, sleep or no sleep, waiting for him to return, for he was sleeping in the attitude he adopted when they lay awake chatting. Doubtless Alexander was also sleeping by now, without any idea of the many things concerning him which had been happening. Did he sleep on his side, to keep dreams at bay? Or, like Georges, on his back, to encourage them?

The next day Georges blessed that upper chapel in the gallery which had long been the

object of his curses: Alexander was up there, serving mass for Father Lauzon. The Father had surely devised that means of saving Alexander from further humiliation, for it was possible that the penance had not yet been remitted. Heaven send that the priest did not keep the boy after the service, to catechise him! If Father Lauzon was already informed of Georges' statement, and talked to Alexander about it, Alexander might give everything away. It was important that he be made aware of the official version as soon as possible. Georges planned to write a note during the study period after mass, which Lucien could leave in Alexander's drawer in the refectory before breakfast.

Georges had started to write the note when he was informed that Father Lauzon was asking for him. Disturbed at not having had time to complete his message, he left the room in a hurry, so that he might soon be back.

Outside the Father's door, he could hear him talking. Who could be in there with him? It was Alexander. Probably he had only just arrived, for he was standing; equally probably, he knew nothing yet, for he appeared astounded when Georges entered the room.

The Father made them sit down facing each other, one on each side of his desk. Alexander kept his face expressionless, but seemed to relax a little at the suspicion of a wink which Georges gave him. If only he remembered Georges' advice, contradicted nothing Georges said, and realised that here was a new chance to be seized!

"I sent for you this morning," Father Lauzon said, "in order to say something to you about the—relationship you have formed between you, and without my knowledge."

He paused, contemplated the "Adoration of the Lamb", and turned to Georges.

"M. le Supérieur told me, before Meditation, of the confession which you made to him

last night. I am surprised that it did not occur to you to address yourself, in the first instance, to me."

"I thought, Father," Georges said, "that it was more a matter of discipline, than of conscience; and since it concerned two boys not belonging to the same division of the school, I did not put the matter before M. le Prefet, either."

"For you it was, perhaps, no more than a matter of discipline; but it was, unfortunately, becoming a matter of conscience for our young friend here."

Father Lauzon looked at Alexander, who remained unmoved, at least apparently.

"You," he went on, "were only joking; but he took you seriously. You had used the expression 'caressing voice'; he sent you kisses—do you understand me—kisses!"

The Father accompanied these words with a short dry laugh which reminded Georges of the laugh used by Blajan to emphasise his own remarks on André's behaviour. Alexander, with an outraged expression, flushed up to the eyes. Georges immediately, and in an ironical tone, said, "Kisses? Really? Why not—chocolate croquettes?"

At that Alexander burst out laughing—but his laughter was very different from the priest's; it was triumphant laughter, in which Georges could sense a secret *tu quoque*; his evocation of yesterday's assignation was, as it were, another kiss for them.

"Well, the ice is broken, evidently," Father Lauzon said, smiling. "A facetious remark has accomplished more than all my speeches. And it confirms my conviction that there has, indeed, been nothing between you two *but* facetiousness.

"A child's laughter is the language of his soul. Corrupt creatures never laugh. You have remained, thank God, what you should be—children. At the same time you will have

realised—it has been knowledge not too dearly bought—the great disadvantages and improprieties of irregular relationships. Whatsoever is clandestine is nearly always troublesome.

“At bottom I was never really very anxious about this young rascal—I know him too well. But his little head has made a mountain out of a molehill, a true story out of a fable. If he had confessed the name of his correspondent from the beginning, everything would have been amicably settled at once. On the other hand, I do not like to think what might have been the outcome if that correspondent had not intervened.

“As it is, all that remains is for Monsieur Alexander to offer his very humble apologies to M. le Supérieur.”

Once again Alexander flushed; it was clear that he thought this too much to ask of him. But Georges nodded to him to acquiesce. And Alexander must then have realised that he could apologise while retaining his moral superiority, yield without being vanquished.

“Whenever you wish,” he said.

The Father appeared satisfied.

“So—the college angel resumes his angelic role. I use the term, my son, not to excite your vanity, but to stimulate your zeal; did you know that St Jean-François Régis was so called, when he was a schoolboy?”

Father Lauzon rose, stooped, and kissed both boys lightly on top of their heads. He said, “In his first Epistle to the Thessa-lonians, St Paul concludes with these words: ‘Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.’ There are kisses and kisses; kisses you will find in novels—and let us leave them there; and holy kisses—the kisses a child gives his parents, kisses of

peace, kisses of forgiveness.

“The apostle, in the same Epistle, also gave this advice—’Pray ceaselessly’. The Reverend Father preacher exhorted you to the same end in his first sermon last October, and M. le Supérieur repeated that exhortation in his New Year allocution. It was, certainly, prayer which has preserved both of you among the dangers you had been unwittingly exposed to. I am aware that you are both faithful to the practice of daily communion, which is the most beautiful of all prayers.”

“I have only missed once this term,” Georges said.

“That,” Alexander said, “was probably the day you stayed in bed because you were ill.”

Alexander seemed delighted to have managed an allusion to equal Georges\* remark about the chocolate croquettes in recalling an aspect of their friendship under Father Lauzon’s nose; he, too, was recalling the time of their quarrel, by which their friendship had been enlarged. But his sally had been imprudent: it bore witness to an interest altogether too affectionate.

“I see,” said the priest, “that it was high time to reduce your feelings to some kind of order. The—sympathy—you had for each other must soon have disturbed even your religious exercises. From today you will put an end to this premature relationship. Next year you will be together, in the same division. I hope that then, without any question of romantic nonsense, it will be possible for you to resume your friendship on a proper footing.”

In chapel Alexander was no longer facing Georges. He had been removed from the front row and Georges finally located him in the back one. Henceforth, the refectory was the only

place in which it was possible for them to exchange glances.

For some time Georges refrained from taking any action. He avoided asking to leave the room during study, in order not to give rise to any suspicions. It was necessary to pretend to have returned docilely within the pale, before trying to escape from it again. There were only twelve days of term left before the Easter holidays. Next term the whole incident, which was in any case unknown to the other boys, would have been forgotten by the authorities. It was not great sacrifice to remain inactive until then.

There was, too, an idea at the back of Georges' mind which sometimes made him smile, but which, at other times, he took seriously so that it was a comfort to him. He was waiting for a miracle. For had not everything between Alexander and himself been miraculous, including the manner in which they had extricated themselves from their difficulty?

But not a week had gone by before he was finding this state of affairs intolerable. Since no miracle had come to him, he would, like Mahomet to the mountain, go to it. It now seemed to him absurd to set such limits to his actions on the basis of mere assumptions, and he decided to discover, by trial, whether or not discipline, touching his freedom, had really been stiffened. One morning, accordingly, he asked permission to absent himself; it was granted with the customary benevolence, and he tasted the pleasure of being once again at liberty.

He made his way to the conservatory, still full of the scent of orange blossom, and smelled the flowers which Alexander had smelled. He sat down on the staging where they had sat together side by side. The pictures conjured up by his surroundings made him feel the present constraint all the more keenly. He made up his mind to launch a new campaign,

resuming his old methods of working.

His first move was to begin a series of visits to Father Lauzon in the hope of meeting Alexander. His pretexts, this time, were not conscientious scruples; he pretended to be seeking advice for his holiday reading. Georges started arguments on some of the prohibitions he found in the *Manual of the Index*. In default of actually seeing Alexander he would have been glad enough to talk about him, even once only. He brought the conversation round to Jean-François Régis, asking for a bibliography on the Angel of the College. But the Father would not let the conversation take a side-track, and went on to speak of St Thomas who, for a different reason, is called the Angel of the School.

Georges had written a very touching note which he counted on slipping into Alexander's drawer during the break. He went to piano practice more often than usual. He took some mulberry leaves to the history master for his silk-worms, or a biscuit for his pet mouse; his sole object was to slip into the refectory on his way, but there was always someone there—almost as if on purpose to watch him.

On Palm Sunday, two days before school broke up, the procession took place inside the chapel, owing to bad weather. Georges, being among the first of the senior school file, trod close on the heels of the last boys in the junior school contingent which was leading the procession. He was thus separated from Alexander by only three other junior boys. With a little manœuvring by both of them, he could have been standing next to him. And he could see that Alexander was bitterly regretting that he had not thought of this. In fact he appeared to have some communication which he was particularly anxious to deliver to Georges, and Georges thought that he had caught a glimpse of the usual folded square of paper half-hidden

in the other's hand. This made him all the angrier with his own stupidity, and he worked his anger out on his palm frond—leaving only a single leaf on it.



Furious at having missed so fine an opportunity, he swore that before the day was out he would, at all costs, contrive to get a note to Alexander somehow. But a fresh attempt which he made to use the refectory method, before luncheon, failed like all the others. Moreover it appeared as if Alexander had been equally out of luck, for there was no note awaiting him. But at least, now, they were on a footing of perfect understanding; the looks they managed to exchange were full of hope and of disappointment.

Georges had sworn to be the first to resume their correspondence, but it now seemed to him that he would probably be bolder if the note he sent was less compromising. He tore up the one he had written and wrote another, more anodyne, which, however, he also tore up. Better, he thought, to write nothing than to write too little. In the end, he confined himself to giving Alexander his home address, adding no more than the words *A toi*.

That evening, on his way back from the Academy session, he managed to carry out his mission. Thereupon he bitterly regretted not having stuck to his original note. But it could not be helped and he would make up for it at Easter with the letter he would write to Alexander.

At dinner the next day he found Alexander's reply in his drawer; Fate was smiling on them again. The message was a page torn from a hymn-book; the text of the hymn had been cut so as to give it a different meaning.

At the top of the page was printed a general title, "During Passion"; beneath this appeared the title of the hymn itself, "Noble Banner of Jesus Christ." It was no soft and tender hymn like the one under the general heading "During Christmas" sung on the eve of

the last holidays. This was the hymn of a passion rich in ardour and spiritual trouble. Georges, reading it in bed, under cover of the bed-clothes and by the light of his torch, was disturbed by it. He could see the pastel tints of an eclogue changing into the darker shades of a tragedy. Certainly Alexander would no longer be able to rally him upon *his* choice of words!

*Je t'aime, je t'adore—  
Qu'à jamais sur mon cœur  
Ma tendresse t'enlace!*

*Quand d'amères alarmes  
Oppresseront mon sein,  
Tu recevras mes larmes.*

*Et mes lettres tremblantes,  
A u jour de la douleur  
S'attacheront brûlantes  
A tes pieds—  
Restez sur ma poitrine.  
Présents du Bien-Aimé!*

*Caché dans mes blessures,*

*Je m'enivre d'amour.*

On the back of the sheet the boy had written two lines in pencil: *Don't write to me. I will write to you.*

Georges, back in his place after Communion, watched Alexander go to the holy table, filling his eyes with the pleasing spectacle as a means of filling his heart to sustain him during the holidays which began that day. Despite the harsh constraints of the past two weeks, he was almost sorry that the holidays were upon them.

At the station, since Father Lauzon was again travelling with Maurice and Alexander, Georges had to get into another carriage. But he was no longer so shy as he had been at Christmas and made up his mind to see Alexander once again. He and Lucien set out along the corridor to explore the train. They located the compartment they were seeking; the door into the corridor was closed and they passed it slowly, pretending to be deep in conversation.

Father Lauzon was reading his breviary. Facing him Alexander sat with his head resting against the back of the seat, apparently asleep. He was wrapped in his blue overcoat, but the skirt of it had fallen apart over his bare knees. Georges would have liked not to have to pass discreetly on; he remembered the first meeting in the conservatory, when he had sat with his head resting upon the boy's knees.

That evening, in the drawing-room, Georges asked his father if he could have a closer look at the coin bearing the head of Alexander—the case was locked. He said something of his school work on Greece, work which had been of use in ensuring his election to the Academy. He said that he had called that golden coin to mind the better to evoke the classical past.

He took the small, heavy disk in his hand with a feeling of respect. He contemplated the effigy of Alexander to which his hand was communicating a gentle warmth, as the other Alexander's body warmed the medal which he wore about his neck. The coin was not symmetrical; it had, said Georges' father, been clipped by some Harpagon of antiquity. But the hero's profile was still sharp and intact. Splendid beneath the plumed helmet, it had defied time and men. The reverse bore a figure of Victory, whose wings seemed borne up by the word, the name Alexander. Here was an augury no less favourable than the Love of Thespis.

"The coin," M. de Sarre said, "is called a stater, and but for the clipping is virtually mint-fresh; it preserves Alexander in all the flower of his perfection, for eternity."

These words gave Georges a delicious pleasure. He kissed his father with charming grace—but could even Father Lauzon have called his kiss holy?

He made up his mind that he, too, would make a collection when he grew up, and it would be devoted to that Alexander who had made his young friend's name illustrious. It would include not only coins but also busts, tapestries, pictures, prints, and all the books ever written about him. He would ruin himself in procuring his collection. It would be his monument. The cult of the Holy Name of Jesus had never inspired Lucien with such fervour as would possess Georges for the Splendid Name of Alexander.

His principal business, every day, was to look out for the post. Between the postman's visits, he went out, in an effort to amuse himself. He rode his bicycle, or went to his fencing lesson, or to the swimming baths, or took a dinghy out on the river. He found he no longer had any taste for remaining about the house. Reading, formerly his favourite pastime, no longer interested him so long as he could not read the message he was hoping to receive. He had borrowed Henri de Regnier's *La Pécheresse* from his father's library, putting another book in its place to hide the gap, as he always did. The novel could no more hold his attention than if it had been a *Life of St Jean-François Régis*.

A letter came for him: but it was only from Lucien. In it Lucien said that this time he had been first in writing to André, so that André had nothing to reproach him with. And he had just read *Thais*, sharing Georges' established admiration for the book, although some passages of it had bored him. "*Is it really possible,*" he wrote, "*that during the last holidays I read 'The Amiable Jesus, translated from the Spanish'?*" Lucien did not repeat the offer of his services as an agent to his astrological uncle, for Georges had declared that he was as little interested in horoscopes as in indulgences.

Georges' report for the term arrived. Under *Remarks*, the Superior had written "A very

good pupil”, but these words were followed by three full stops, or rather dots indicating a reservation, which to Georges seemed highly charged with meaning. His parents paid them no attention. On the other hand his girl cousins, who arrived on the same day as the report, did not fail to notice them, or to speak of them—teasingly. They showed much curiosity about the mysteries of his college.

“All I can tell you about them,” Georges said, “is that they are like those of Mithras—see encyclopaedia; women are excluded.”

“Less thoroughly, perhaps, than you are prepared to admit,” Liliane replied—“for while some are thinking of girls, others take their place.”

This witticism irritated Georges, and he decided to make his cousin pay for it by making himself disagreeable. He was perfectly certain that Alexander was not a substitute for anyone and could not be replaced by anyone. He thought continually of Alexander.

His friend’s failure to write was beginning to worry him. He wondered whether the business of that note, although it had been dealt with at school, might not have had a sequel at home. He trusted in the good faith of his protector, Father Lauzon; but what he feared was that, in Alexander’s case, the Superior might not have confined himself to a hint expressed in three dots.

The constraint of not being able to write to Alexander was painful to him. Presumably the boy had had his reasons for asking Georges not to write to him. By way of self-consolation Georges wrote a short letter to Maurice and another to Blajan, as he had done in the Christmas holidays. He had been tempted to ask after their respective Dulcineas, but refrained from doing so; he did not want to put Liliane in the right, even indirectly. Still less

did he want to give Alexander reason to question Maurice on the subject—Maurice might show him the letter.

On the evening of Easter Tuesday Georges accompanied his cousins to the station, very glad to be rid of them. They had asserted that he was quite changed, constantly sought to be alone, that boarding school was turning a pretty cub into an ill-licked one. To which he had made answer by quoting some heads from the *Imitation*, recalled from recent refectory readings, as that “In worldly intercourse too great familiarity is to be avoided . . .”, that one “should love silence and withdrawal . . .” but “tolerate the faults of others . . .”

When he got back to the house he found a picture postcard waiting for him—as if it had delayed its arrival until his cousins had gone. It bore only two words: *Ever. Alexander.* Enchanted, Georges went up to his room, there to dream at his ease.

True, he would have wished for a longer message, but he had an imagination which enabled him to paraphrase his friend’s happy laconicism. Here was Eternity supported by a name, just as, on the gold stater, the name supported Victory; it was enough. His friend was giving him all that mattered in giving himself for ever.

Georges took pleasure in seeing his own name and mere address written by Alexander’s hand, in a handwriting prouder, firmer, and even more elegant than that of the notes. He considered himself to be now in valid possession of that name and address at last; never before had he been so well confirmed in them.

It pleased him to find a meaning even in the picture: “S., view of the railway station”. Did not Alexander, in choosing it, clearly mean that the only spot in his town which could possibly interest *them* was the railway station, since it must soon serve to bring them

together again?

Georges, in short, was perfectly happy; his fears had all left him. If there had, indeed, been a storm at Alexander's, it could not have been very serious. This idea reconciled him with his parents—he had been detesting them for belonging to the parental order while he supposed his friend persecuted by *his* parents. At dinner he was congratulated on having got over his surliness.

When he was in bed he took up the postcard again, having placed it within reach. Here at home it was not like the dormitory, where he had to read with an electric torch hidden under the bed-clothes. Freely, with the light on, propped up by his pillow, he re-read the boy's notes and the "interpreted" hymn. He set all these messages on his bedside table, together with the lock of the boy's hair; and near them, at the foot of his bedside lamp, he propped up his "Cupid of Thespis". Tomorrow he would write Father Lauzon a really charming letter.

After breakfast he replaced the notes in his wallet. The sunshine which was brightening the room struck a gleam from the lock of hair as Georges was putting it away. He pulled it off the gummed paper on which it was mounted, to make the light play on it, holding it in the hollow of his hand. Its gold was the same as that of the stater, and it seemed to him almost as heavy; for was it not the symbol for the whole of that young, golden head? He recalled the first time when he had seen Alexander's hair in full sunlight, in the college playground, one Sunday in February.

He took the lock of hair in his fingers and arranged it on the head of the "Cupid of Thespis"; suddenly the picture was alive. He left it so and went to wash and dress.

Combing his own hair, he was still thinking of Alexander's. His hair was infinitely more beautiful than his cousin Liliane's; he was accustomed to tell her—to infuriate her—that he believed she had her hair dyed. He wondered what he would look like if he had his own hair bleached. His dark, even complexion and chestnut-brown eyes would hardly match with golden hair. In any case, surely it was ridiculous, undignified, for a man to dye his hair? Nevertheless, Georges took pleasure in the idea of a compromise: he remembered that a few of the boys at St Claude's had a single lock of hair differing in shade from the rest. This whim of nature inspired him with an idea for paying Alexander a very original compliment.

Not wanting to buy the necessary preparations in his own neighbourhood, he got out his bicycle with a view to seeking them at a greater distance. A shop occupied by nobody but the proprietor seemed just what he was looking for. He went in and asked for a blond hair-dye.

"There are four shades," said the hairdresser; "do you want golden blond, ash blond, light blond or just blond?"

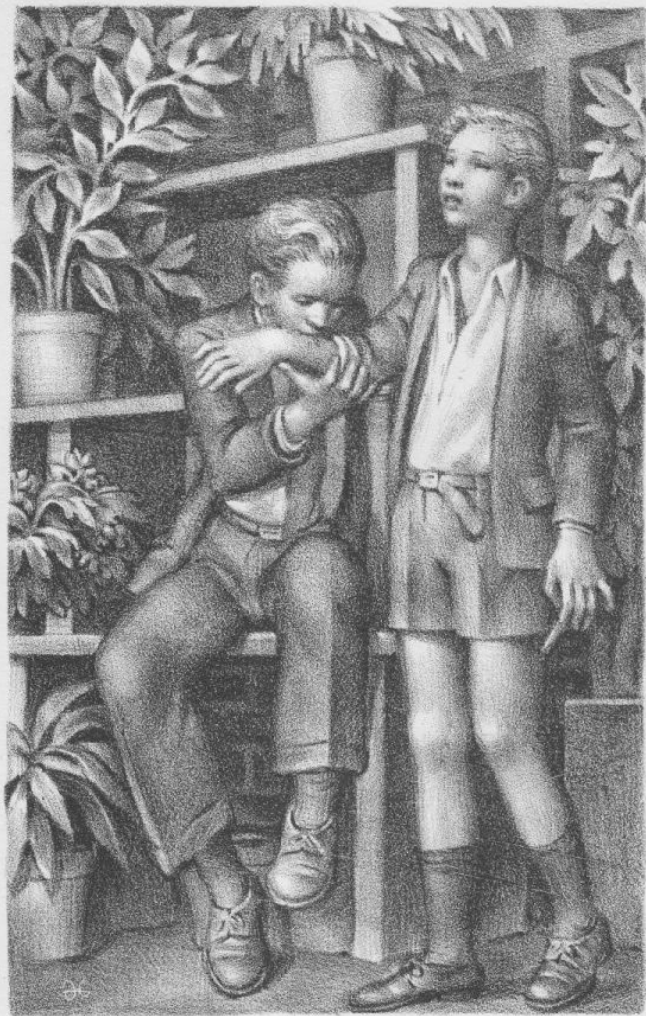
Georges was flummoxed; but then he remembered that he had the lock of Alexander's hair in his wallet. Turning aside, he took it out and showed it to the man.

"Allow me to examine it," the latter said, taking it from Georges. True, the fellow's trade was handling hair, but was he not committing an outrage in touching this particular lock of it?

"This is ash blond," he said, and was about to throw the sample away when Georges snatched it hastily back. A few hairs fell from the lock and Georges was more moved by their loss than he had been by the severance of Anatole France's whole beard in the Superior's study. Only pride prevented him from picking them up.

“In a head of hair like this,” the hairdresser said, “the colour so pale and the texture so fine, the first white hairs are hardly noticeable, and a little oxygenated water is sufficient to colour them.”

The first white hairs? Alexander with white hair? The idea was so clownishly ridiculous that Georges forgave the hairdresser. He smiled and said, “I don’t understand.”



“We are, I take it, dealing with the case of a blonde who wishes to restore the colour of some white hair?”

“No, no, not at all! A person with dark hair who wants to dye it fair—the same colour as the hair I showed you.”

“Ah, now we’re getting somewhere! You don’t call that dyeing hair, but bleaching it. It’s a rather delicate operation and should only be done by a hairdresser.”

“The person in question is anxious to try doing it at home, to begin with on a single lock of hair.”

“In that case I shall let you have a preparation of my own. The person you refer to will have only to moisten the hair with a piece of cotton-wool soaked in the solution. It should be done with due care, beginning at the roots.”

Georges raced home on his bicycle, from time to time touching the bottle in his pocket, to make sure that the cork was firmly in place. He dwelt on his conversation with the hairdresser, giggling over his “Now we’re getting somewhere!” It had been a positive inquisition! Or rather, an expedition across the whole territory of the capillary art, to get at the truth.

Seated before the looking-glass in his room, Georges wondered which side to have his lock of fair hair: left or right? Or in the middle? He decided for the left; it was the heart side. He separated a lock which was long enough to hang down over his forehead, like the one which sometimes fell across Alexander’s eyes, and carried out the hairdresser’s orders.

It was the first time in his life that he had ever done anything to alter his appearance. This touch of fairness was not unbecoming to him. The shade was the same as Alexander's—he compared them. He could not, however, help regretting the facility with which he had achieved a result which, in Alexander's case, he had thought of as an inimitable miracle. He combed his hair again, covering the blond lock with his dark hair. Only the tip showed, like an arrow-head.

During dinner his mother noticed this little peculiarity. Georges explained it by reference to an unfortunate choice of a hair-washing preparation which must have contained peroxide. His cousins would not have been so easily put off. Liliane, blonde though she was, could have had no reason to believe a compliment to herself intended. His golden lock, symbol of another head than hers, must, in her eyes, have appeared as one more indication of what she called “the great metamorphosis of boarding-school boys”.

And Georges was, in fact, much changed, changed more than by a lock of hair, more than Alexander had seemed changed to Father Lauzon. What he found in his own house was no more than the past; present and future were elsewhere. Alexander made him indifferent to all else, because Alexander was more than everything else. Yesterday's postcard had not restored his taste for anything else, because, in Alexander's absence, there was nothing else. He realised the worth of the affection which he had fostered with his very marrow: the sight of its object had become necessary to his physical and moral equilibrium. He would not start to live again until he was back in college. It was only outside of his family life, as well as of his school life, that now and henceforth his real life must be sought: in the words of one of his notes, Alexander had become his life.

His cousins had remarked that he had developed a habit of solitude; it was because he could thus foster the illusion of being with Alexander. But he possessed him so utterly that he had no fear of losing him. Other people seemed to exist only to recall some aspect of Alexander. At meal-times, for example, when the subject of school was broached, or reference made to the Academy, the Superior, or the Cardinal, it was the boy's wellloved face which appeared before Georges' inner eye, as if what—or whosoever—had come near to him, was absorbed into him or could be reduced to him. Georges had only to open his hand gently, palm upwards, the back of his hand on the table-cloth, and it was as if he could see lying there the gold stater or the lock of fair hair. Once in the drawing-room, however, he dared not ask for the key of the coin-case again, for fear of drawing attention to his secret. He had to be content to hang over the glazed lid, and crown Alexander again with an imaginary kiss. And he was provided with a new order of evocations by a collector's piece, one of several used to decorate the room: it was a silver censer, seventeenth-century work, which called to mind Alexander's censuring of himself. He raised the lid, and, from the empty cup, rose a faint odour of incense which he breathed in with keen pleasure; the scent became mingled, in his mind, with that of the lavender which had long clung to the lock of Alexander's hair. Gold and silver, incense and sweet scent, were not these the things which he gave to Alexander on the day of Epiphany, on the first Sunday when they had stood face to face, the Sunday of the Kings?

At last, on April 22nd, and by the last post, came a letter from Alexander. Georges, wild with joy, wondered where he should go to read it. He had used his own room to read the

postcard. His mother was receiving visitors in the drawing-room. He went to the estate office, which nobody was using, and sank into one of its leather easy-chairs.

He put a finger under the flap of the envelope, then hesitated: this was an ignoble way to open such a letter, the first he had had from Alexander. The idea of seeing the edge of the envelope all roughly torn was displeasing to him. He got up and fetched a paper-knife: he ought to have had the one used by the Superior, in the Academy, which bore the inscription, "God and France". He chose the most handsome on the desk; and the letter deserved it—six large pages! That made up for the postcard's brevity. Before beginning to read Georges passed a hand over his hair, and pulled up his socks, which were concertinaed.

*S., April 21, 19—*

*My dear Georges,*

*I swore to manage it, and here I am doing so—getting through to you. But really I was beginning to despair of being able to write you a real letter, and in time for the 23rd, your name day. My best, my most affectionate good wishes. May St Georges protect us more efficaciously than St Alexander! Now our two patron saints are together, and may do better.*

*At college—you realised, of course?—I was under constraint. Acting on Lauzon's orders, the Supervisor would no longer let me go out during study. I succeeded in getting my hymn to you in the interval between two classes.*

*Here, things are even worse. To start with, Lauzon has set me a holiday task—always Lauzon!—keeping a sort of notebook—religious, pascal—call it what you like, it's the*

same kind as our Retreat notebooks. This was simply a fresh excuse for keeping me closely watched and preaching at me all the time. Then, my report came, and the Superior—a dirty trick, this—had written “has passed through a little crisis”. I was reminded of the Prefect’s “taint”. Taint and crisis belong together. My father told me that Lauzon had told him about it, and he was quite decent, really. He confined himself to a short “speech” on the subject of permissible—and unpermissible—feelings; then, in his medical capacity, he took up my director of conscience’s tale about “evil thoughts”, only he called them “evil habits”. I pity them, with their “evil”! At all events, on one pretext or another, I am constantly watched, and have to be careful. Also, they are forcing me to see old acquaintances, join a group, and so on, so that here, as at school, I am never alone. That is why I have only been able to send you a postcard up to now—that was in an interval at the cinema.

Today—eve of your name day—Lauzon came to take me for a walk. He was soon telling me that he had had a most edifying letter from you. That was the first time he had uttered your name since we were both together in his room. It gave me so much pleasure that I immediately decided to make it up with him—I had been scowling at him consistently till then. But by way of revenge for all I had had to put up with from him, I wanted to have a joke at his expense; I told him that I was, at that moment, being crushed by Providence, like Saul on the road to Damascus. I was imagining what you would say if in my shoes, but I was uneasy, afraid I had overdone it. Not a bit of it! There was my man as pleased as a dog with two tails, as if that were just what he had been waiting for! And going on to say that he had never doubted me, that his trust in me was completely

*restored, that my holiday behaviour had—very much in spite of myself— reassured him, that I was “over the worst”. “Back at college,” he added, “everything will henceforth proceed without difficulty.”*

*I said I hoped so. Thereupon we went into a church in order to say a prayer “of encouragement and gratitude”. After that he let me return to the house. By a miracle nobody was in and I immediately seized the opportunity. So you see what this letter cost me.*

*It is impossible to write to you at night because I sleep in the same room as Maurice. He admitted that Lauzon had told him to keep an eye on me and make sure I was not engaged in a clandestine correspondence. He wanted to know who it could be with and was very intrigued. I told him it was with a hunchback.*

*Don’t worry, by the way, about your notes. Every night I slip my wallet under my bolster. That way, your prose and poetry say all sorts of things to me, and I compose long letters in my head, but you never get them. It’s not very cheerful, though.*

*I have to be patient, now, because we have nothing planned. We had nothing to plan for, since you gave in—I mean appeared to give in. Forgive me if that sounds reproachful, I know very well that it wasn’t from cowardice, and I myself did much the same sort of thing today; but I shall not do it again because it seems to me finer to refuse to give in.*

*And why should we always give in? Must we, just because we’re children, always be wrong? Children are living beings like anyone else. Why should they be the only ones not to have the right to love? In any case, with us two, they’re wasting their time. No parents and no masters can prevent us from loving each other, my Well-Beloved.*

*PS. On the second day of term—Friday, in memory of our Fridays—come to the conservatory at six o'clock. Somehow I'll manage to get there.*

*I bought a bottle of lavender water.*

Georges read the letter three times running and then covered it with kisses. His heart exulted. He rose and moved about the better to feel the sheer joy of living. He went out onto the terrace and walked up and down for a while. This letter, a real profession of faith, inspired him with as much enthusiasm as André's had Lucien. It included the same kind of claim to certain rights as André had, albeit briefly, made; the same rebellious feeling which he himself had once experienced at the idea that his friendship should have to suffer an outsider's judgment. But what, in his case, had been only a passing impulse, and in André's case a secondary remark, was, in Alexander's letter, a decided and final protest. Georges at once adopted it as his own. Now, he would have braved the whole world.

When he was in bed that night he folded the letter in four and put it into the pocket of his pyjama jacket: there it would lie against his heart while he slept, as his own notes lay, night after night, beneath the boy's sleeping head.

The morning, next day, was such a lovely one that Georges went down in his night things to walk round the garden. He went to the conservatory—that was, surely, the appropriate pilgrimage to make on St Georges' Day. Had not St Alexander's been celebrated inside a

conservatory? There were no orange-trees in this one, but still it was sweetly scented. Wistaria rambled beneath the lights and pots of hyacinths crowded the staging.

Georges was glad to be associating this fresh sweetness with the friend whose letter he proposed to re-read in that spot. His mother had told him that wistaria, in the language of flowers, stood for delicacy of feeling in friendship. And he knew that hyacinths recalled the youthful Hyacinthus, beloved of Apollo, who had raised those flowers from his friend's blood. He picked a few of their bells and slipped them into the envelope of the letter.

Then he sat down on a tub from which he could see the staircase of the terrace. He took pleasure in imagining that the boy who filled his thoughts was his guest and was coming down into the garden to join him, wearing pyjamas like his own. The boy leaped over the clipped box edgings, and played about the fountain. His uncombed hair fell over his eyes. He stopped by the statue of the god Terminus and stroked his stone beard. He lay down in the very centre of the lawn and rolled ecstatically upon the turf. Then he rose and came towards the conservatory, where Georges waited for him, as at St Claude's. And thinking of their furtive assignations there, at college, they laughed at thus finding themselves together, in pyjamas, in a conservatory.

It was too late for the few lines which Georges now received from Maurice to cause him any excitement; he had something better. But he felt, all the more keenly, the fact that he could not write to Alexander. To kill time he conceived the idea of devoting himself to an undertaking which should be dedicated to his friend, while waiting to begin on the historical collection which he was one day to build about Alexander's name. He decided to gather together an anthology of all the poems about boys, and dedicate it to Alexander. This should

be Alexander's crown, worthier of Parnassus than the Hôtel de Rambouillet's. The library was quite a well-stocked one; Georges had ample material to examine; the work would fill the last part of his holidays.

He began with the moderns but ran through numerous lists of contents in vain. There was nothing for him there. Was his own epoch to leave nothing, on this subject, but the "Child's prayer on waking", the "Joy of the household" and other verses suitable for preachers and such worthy folk, dealing with the "Angel in the home"? Was it possible that the most sensitive and beautiful of all beings had inspired nothing but family and religious poetry? But no doubt he would find a difference in the works of M. de Fersen, from which André had extracted verses for Lucien's benefit. Unfortunately the library contained none of the works of that far from widely read author.

Georges hoped to do better with the ancients. But he found the Greeks not particularly well-represented in the library: apart from Homer and the dramatists, there were only prose writers, and it did not, of course, occur to him to apply to them.

Rome was better represented. Ignoring Virgil, whose principal eclogues were already known to him, Georges concentrated on translations of various Latin poets. He discovered a great deal in them, certainly—more than he had bargained for. He was seeking lines which would move him—not shock him.

In the end he retained, of all he read, only one brief epigram, in which Catullus proposed to place three hundred thousand kisses, or even more, on Juventius' "honeyed eyes . . .". That must be antiquity's gift to Alexander. "Honeyed eyes . . ." Honeyed words had appeared in their relationship already—in the poem to the *Bien-Aimé*, the well-beloved. The boy might

say that this was going too far; he was being drowned in honey up to the eyes.

Thinking of that poem, Georges felt embarrassed by the fact that Alexander was still under the impression that he, Georges, was its author. This fraud, which had at first delighted him, was now becoming disagreeable to him. It was his duty to tell Alexander nothing but the truth. When he quoted Catullus to him, he would say something about Edmond Rostand.

Meanwhile he had had a letter from Father Lauzon—it made the fifth communication, including de Blajan's and Maurice's answers to his letters, which he had received from S., in a week. It was very obvious that all his guns had been trained on a single target. He was entertained by the reappearance of "I" at the beginning of the good Father's every paragraph: this singularity would surely be taken as evidence of the priest's energetic and decided character.

*My dear boy,*

*I thank you for your letter, to which I was in no hurry to reply: college boys on holiday should be left in peace. My letter will, therefore, be a sort of preface to the new term.*

*I was pleased with what you wrote, for in it I see proof that you still hold to your good resolutions. I see, moreover, that you have profited by the advice I gave you as to your reading, but I do not know the work you mention ("Lovable Jesus"). However, in this as in all other matters, you cannot do better than ask your parents' advice. It is their mission, shared with your school-masters, to teach you to live your life prudently.*

*I congratulate you, too, on not having forgotten that you are soon to be finally*

*received into the Congregation. It is evident, from what you tell me of your determination not to be satisfied with a too limited moral perfection, that you are aware of the full significance and range of this event.*

*I am, believe me, your affectionate friend in Jesus Christ.*

† *Lauzon.*

*PS. I made a pious intention for you in celebrating the holy sacrifice of the mass.*

The first day of the new term came at last Georges would have liked to take Alexander's letter back to school with him, but he thought it wiser to leave it at home, together with Alexander's other notes. Who knew what might happen during the last term of the year? Moreover, this act of prudence would save him from having to show Lucien a message which he was jealous of eyes other than his own ever seeing. True, Lucien had not absolutely insisted on being shown the notes, but there was some risk of his claiming equality of treatment in the matter of the letter—he had let Georges read André's. Georges could swear, with a clear conscience, that it was out of his power to satisfy him.

He emptied a valuable little coffer which he took from the drawing-room, and bore it off to his room. He told his mother that he wanted it to keep his *tableaux d'honneur* and other college papers in, and asked her permission to keep the key. He slipped Lucien's letters, under a piece of cardboard, beneath the precious hoard of notes from Alexander. He kept only the boy's lock of hair with him. He put it in his wallet with the Thespis picture, which had received the Superior's *visa*.

He did not return to St Claude's by rail, as he had done in January; his parents took him in the car. They were surprised by his high spirits. In the course of his parents' call on the Superior, the significant dots which had appeared in his term's report were not mentioned. Evidently M. l'Académicien was firmly back in the Superior's good graces; and he could hardly have been received back alone. For Alexander, too, then, the unfortunate affair of last March was a closed file.

As soon as he was free, Georges made the rounds of the school in search of his friend. But in vain, it was getting late, and he was forced to return to Lucien during break. He had a few moments' chat with Maurice and was happy, at last, to hear the bell ringing for the traditional *salut* with which term began.

His eyes sought the fair, bright head which had shone there, in the back row, last term. Its absence began to worry him. Then, suddenly, he thought himself deluded by a wish-born illusion: there was Alexander entering the choir at the head of the acolytes, with Father Lauzon, the celebrant that day, bringing up the rear.

This was generous reparation—the first miracle worked by St George and St Alexander in partnership. The hymns rang with hallelujahs: the time of the Passion was over.

From time to time Georges saw Alexander smile—probably at the idea of the pleasant surprise he was giving his friend. A red tie glowed, like a rallying sign, in the opening of his robe. It matched, not only the robe itself and Georges' own tie, but the priest's cope and the tabernacle ornaments. The colour dear to the two friends was everywhere.

Georges referred to his missal to see whose feast it was: SS. Clet and Marcellin, Popes and Martyrs. But no, nothing that evening suggested martyrdom—not even, as before

Christmas, the martyrdom of a lamb.

Never had Alexander looked so handsome. He glowed with happiness. Georges, with his book open before him, had his eyes fixed beyond it, on a point which drew him irresistibly. He was dwelling upon his friend's profile again—better far than all the engravings and medals he had studied, than poetry ancient or modern, than glory and riches, than life and all eternity. He dwelt upon the mouth, at once flower and fruit, the golden hair—scented, no doubt, with lavender—the clean, sweet line of the nape, the shell-pink, exquisitely formed ear.

Georges' love, at that moment, was not confined to Alexander: through him and because of him, he loved the college, felt grateful to Father Lauzon, the Superior, each and every master. None of them, it seemed to him, could henceforth be objects of fear: the very air they all breathed was benign.

There was no talking in the dormitory. The Father on duty was new and seemed excessively zealous. He repeated his rounds time and again. And when he was no longer to be heard, yet still they could see him, now in one place, now in another.

Georges reflected that although this meant the loss of his nocturnal talks, there was at least one consolation. The former supervisory Father of his division had been transferred to the junior school to replace the one who had dealt so harshly with Alexander. Presumably, therefore, Alexander would be allowed out of study, since Father Lauzon's fears had, to all appearances, been set at rest, and he would therefore not renew his special orders. As for Georges himself, he was persuaded that the newcomer was inclined to favour him; he surely

had every reason to count on the goodwill of a man who was called Father de Trennes. That *de* must be a sort of bond between them. There were not many boys at the school who bore names distinguished by it. And, on the other side of the fence, only the Superior, the chapel master, and the Rhetoric form master were noble.

On the other hand, Father de Trennes, with his great height, his lined and haggard face, his hair *en brosse*, and his penetrating eyes, was an imposing personage.

After their long separation Georges and Alexander were once again together in the conservatory at last. And immediately Alexander noticed the fair lock of Georges' hair, which, in his friend's honour, Georges had exposed. Alexander at once realised the significance of this gallant gesture, for he laughed and said, "What a charming idea!"

"But also, don't you think, rather an odd one? However, it's a secret very easy to hide."

Taking out his pocket-mirror, he rearranged his hair so as to conceal the long blond lock, explaining, "Since I couldn't write to you, I had to do something to show you that I had been thinking of you."

He went on to tell the other of the poetical inquest he had carried out with him in mind, and quoted Catullus' lines to Juventius, about the three hundred thousand odd kisses. Having considered the matter he decided—partly from pride, partly to avoid the impression of delivering a lecture on literature—to say nothing about Edmond Rostand. What did it matter? The words of the poem *Bien-Aimé* no longer belonged either to their author, or to the plagiarist, but to Alexander.

"There's something I've thought of, too," Alexander said, "a thing we have to do.

Exchange a few drops of blood with each other. In that way we'll be united for ever."

He took a pen-knife from his pocket, rolled back one of his sleeves, and made a slight incision in his arm: a few drops of blood appeared. He offered Georges his arm so that he could drink them. Then he gave him the knife, and it was his turn to taste blood. Then they stood side by side in silence while their wounds closed up.

Georges was overcome by this scene, whose swift passage had not lessened its value in his eyes. His own notions seemed to him poor things compared with the younger boy's. He was ashamed of his wretched Juventius. Nor, under the impression made by what Alexander had just done, would he have dared turn his literary kisses into real ones. In the matter of imagination he had been over-reached, but he did not mind; he was in all the delight of possessing such a friend as this.

He thought of Lucien, who had celebrated similar rites with André. How sorry Georges had once been to realise that he had found Lucien too late; and how glad he was, now, of this same circumstance. For what he had just done was a thing which could be done only once.

Georges was united—for ever indeed—to the person whom he loved more than he had ever loved anyone. They were united not only by literary quotations and kisses, notes and fair hair, but by their very blood. They were initiated into each other. Each had been both priest and victim. Their friendship had become a religion, they had set it beyond the power of chance to destroy it; they had assimilated it to themselves; and, as in the words of the canticle, it was hidden in their wounds.

Sunday, the last day of April: at the meeting of the Congregation, candidates knelt at the

altar, candle in hand. Father Lauzon asked them the usual questions, and they answered together.

“My children, what is it brings you here to the altar of Mary?”

“Father, it is the most ardent desire to be received into the Congregation of the most Holy Virgin.”

The priest then urged the candidates to cultivate those virtues which must distinguish a Child of Mary, notably purity, and then declared them received. The new Children of Mary then recited the act of consecration, and the Father pinned a medal, on a green ribbon, to their chests. Finally, they exchanged the kiss of peace with the other boys: thus, under Father Lauzon’s eyes, Georges and Alexander—impassive—exchanged a holy kiss.

Georges and Lucien had resolved that that night they would stay awake as late as necessary, to resume their former nocturnal conversations. Since the first day of term they had, in default of being able to chatter in the dormitory, been forced to tell each other their secrets during break. Georges was no longer as reserved as he had been during the early days of his friendship with Alexander: even before the last vacation he had taken pleasure in hearing Lucien talk about André. But there was more pleasure for both of them, in these confidences, at night, and they had no wish to deprive themselves of the enjoyment any longer.

And they were not so intimidated by Father de Trennes as they had been. They were now better informed concerning him; moreover he himself showed an inclination to be friendly. It appeared that he was an archaeologist, a friend of the Superior, and he was resting at the college after a long residence in the Near East where he had been carrying out some

research work. He had asked to be allowed the humble role of dormitory and study supervisor—no doubt by way of paying his score.

He was a man of very distinguished bearing and appearance. No cassocks of a cloth finer than his had ever been seen at St Claude's, nor manners at once so noble and so urbane, nor cheeks so scrupulously close-shaven and lightly powdered. All these refinements modified the severity of the first impression made by him.

Father de Trennes was already on good terms with the older boys: he liked to pace the playground with them during breaks, talking of his travels. He was also carefully cultivating the boys of the fourth form, joining in their football games—and claiming that he was not strong enough to play with their elders. But, despite the rules, he did not force any boy to play, and it was noticed that the Father Prefect did not dare to interfere. In study he never refused permission to do anything whatever. It was only in the dormitory that he seemed to be determined, by his vigilance, to establish the strictest discipline. There was nothing for it but to be even more persevering than he was.

At last Georges saw the light extinguished in the Father's room—the dark curtain had not been pulled quite across the window. He called Lucien, who was dozing. In order to carry on their conversation as discreetly as possible they had pushed their beds closer together before getting into them. Georges had planned a brilliant come-back for the occasion: he uncovered his chest and displayed his Congregational medal pinned to his pyjama jacket. Lucien smothered a fit of laughter.

"You've forgotten the days when you used to show me your scapulars," Georges said. "But it's not you I'm copying, it's one of my uncles, who wears his medal ribbons on his

dressing-gown. Besides, I like this *Enfant de Marie* medal. Have you had a careful look at the obverse? It has two hearts pierced by a dagger, surrounded by roses and thorns, and shooting out flames. The flames fit me nicely—they're my family device, suggested by a pun on my name, and just about as good as the kind of puns we make here. It's *Sarmentis flamma*."

"It's a life-work, but I hope you're insured against fire!" "Then, the dagger is the pen-knife with which Alexander and I cut our arms, like you did with André. As for the roses and thorns——"

Suddenly Georges saw Lucien, who had started to smile at the roses and thorns, shut his eyes and fall abruptly into that total stillness which indicates deep sleep. At the same time a slight sound from a creaking floor-board made him turn his head. The dormitory Father was standing at the foot of his bed. He moved on to stand beside Lucien's and said, "Now don't pretend to be asleep, my dear young Monsieur Rouvère."

So saying, he smiled, and his smile reassured Georges. Father de Trennes sat down on Georges' bedside table, so that he was between their two pillows—instead of the shades of Alexander and André.

"And what," he said, "can the two inseparables have to say to each other at this late hour?"

He was still smiling and his voice had become barely audible—a murmur rather than a voice.

"They were probably telling each other," he went on, "that their new usher—temporary, acting—who had led the afternoon walk, and then preached at vespers, must be thoroughly

tired and would be letting himself relax a little. Well, as you see, he had turned into his room, but he was not asleep. He was listening, with an ear glued to the window curtain. He knows, you see, that a watch kept up for a certain length of time will in the end always discourage those who only want to indulge in pointless chatter. But he also knows that those who have more serious reasons for wanting to talk, are able to wait more patiently. And anything of serious import interests him—which is what makes *him*, in his turn, patient in waiting.”

The Father had been wrong to recall his vespers sermon: the grandiose visions which his eloquence had conjured up in the chapel were hostile to the mood of his nocturnal whisperings. He glanced first at Georges, then at Lucien, probably to see what effect his words had produced. But Georges avoided his eyes; he was experiencing an embarrassment which was, apparently, shared by Lucien. Father de Trennes continued:

“Archaeology is an absorbing science—as you know, it is my profession in the world. A temple can be reconstituted from a few fragments of its architecture; or an inscription restored although most of the words in it have been worn away. Unlike most men, I apply my professional skill to life itself. Here, for example, I can reconstitute each boy’s secrets from a movement, a glance, the most trifling indication.

“For instance, it was clear to me, on ray very first night, that your isolation in this corner—the bed on M. de Sarre’s left being unoccupied—must be favourable to the projects of two such astute young men as you seem to me to be. I kept my eyes and ears open, but I was beginning to feel that I had been wrong, in your case as in that of your fellow seniors here, when I noticed, just now, that your beds had, miraculously, drawn closer together. So I came

to see whether the miracle had had any consequences.”

He looked at Georges and Lucien, believing, apparently, that he had now put them at their ease. But Georges, more surprised than ever, shot a questioning glance at Lucien and then, like him, turned his eyes away from the priest's.

“Very well,” the latter said, rising suddenly to his feet, “the joke has gone on quite long enough.”

His voice was pitched as low as before, but its tone had changed.

“On your knees, both of you—quickly now!” he added.

Under cover of the bed-clothes Georges had removed his Child of Mary medal. He knelt on the bedside rug, Lucien setting the example.

“Not there, if you please!” the Father said, “out in the aisle, so that I can see what you're up to.”

He leaned against the lockers which furnished that end of the dormitory, not far from the two boys. He had taken his chaplet from his pocket and was passing the beads silently through his fingers.

Georges did not know what to make of this mixture of blarney and strictness. The priest had first tried to reassure them, then punished them. He had, as it were, raised them up only the more effectively to cast them down. What kind of man was he? What he said was hardly less unexpected than what he did. He eavesdropped, like a lackey, or like Nero, behind curtains. He tried to overhear people's conversation—but in order to join in; prolonged the conversation, and then suddenly became angry. Became angry because one had been talking—or because one had stopped talking? At all events, for such as were not professional

archaeologists, his behaviour was as difficult to decipher as an incomplete inscription.

However, Georges was not much concerned to get to the heart of the mystery. He was, on the other hand, concerned to avoid annoying a man upon whom his assignments with Alexander were going to depend. He therefore held himself rigidly, on bended knees, so as to prove his goodwill. He thought of his medal; it was in the bed, and the ribbon would get creased.

When the Father had finished his rosary, he approached the two boys again and ordered them to stand up. Drawing them together he put his arms round them and strained them to him, as if to express his forgiveness by an affectionate embrace. Then, slowly, he drew back from them; he studied them by the light of the night-light, but his own face was in the shadow. And at length he said, "You must pray for me a great deal."

The following day Georges and Lucien were even less able to conceive what it was that Father de Trennes had expected of them the night before, so inconsistent was his attitude. For once again his manner to them had undergone a change: he now behaved towards them with complete indifference. He had very soon forgotten that he had commended himself to their prayers, and perhaps regretted ever having done so. Besides, what motive had he for wanting them to pray for him?

In short, the two friends were not far from thinking that he was a bit dotty. They decided, at all events, to avoid exposing themselves to a further invasion of their privacy in case he himself had not already decided to take no further notice of them. Had not the priest himself declared that his visit to their bedsides was "a joke which had gone on long enough"? But it seemed, on the contrary, to have been remarkably short.

Georges was fast asleep when his mind registered a strong light shining on his eyes, and he opened them. At his bedside, on the side where he had no neighbour, he became aware of Father de Trennes who, with an electric torch in his hand, was shining it on Georges' face and observing him. The Father switched off the torch and sat down on the bedside table—one might have supposed that these tables had been made so low only so that he could sit on one.

"Forgive me for waking you," he said. "We will let Rouvère sleep on."

And, sitting up, he switched on the torch again and shone it on Lucien, who was lying facing them.

"See how soundly he sleeps!" he said. "His closed eyes are dwelling upon angels, and his mouth breathing them. He reminds one of Musset's delicious lines:

*Les lèvres des enfants s'ouvrent comme les roses*  
*Au souffle de la nuit . . .*"

And once again Father de Trennes switched on the torch, as if to draw Georges' attention to Lucien's beauty. Did he, who could guess all things, guess that an electric torch had played an important part in Georges' dormitory life last term? That torch had thrown light on a face more handsome than Lucien's, on poetry more delightful than Musset's.

Father de Trennes' quotation was not only flattering to Georges—he was being treated poetically—but encouraged him to trust the priest: Musset was not in very good odour with

the Fathers; it followed that any Father who quoted him was showing himself to be broadminded. Moreover Georges, having nothing on his conscience, judged this nocturnal visit to be unquestionably friendly, and was ready to welcome the patronage it implied as manna from heaven. It would ensure his assignments, strengthen his friendship, with Alexander. He and his friend would have Father de Trennes as an ally against the Superior and the other Fathers. All this was well worth a smile—with which Father de Trennes appeared enchanted. He lowered his head almost to the level of the bolster and whispered, “You’re not sleepy, I hope? I feel we shall be chatting together for some considerable time. For once in a way—and very inadequately—I will replace Lucien.”

His words reached Georges in a clean, fresh breath of toothpaste and toilet water. Georges was disturbed at finding himself, alone and in semi-darkness, thus confidentially addressed by a priest. He thought of Alexander listening after confession to Father Lauzon’s words about evil thoughts. Was Father de Trennes about to recommend certain special prayers to him? For the moment, at all events, he was silent, as if wondering how to begin.

“I wanted,” he said at last, “to congratulate you on being first in Greek. Admirable. I may add that, of all who came first in some subject, you are best fitted to wear that particular crown. You are even more worthy of Plato’s academy than of St Claude’s.”

“I am overwhelmed,” said Georges, giving him another smile. Perhaps, Georges thought, he would be able to give Plato’s academy, as well as St Claude’s, as reference, when he offered himself for election to the *Académie Française*. The Father, in a thoughtful, almost dreamy tone, went on:

“I am very fond of Greek, and of Greece, which I know well, as I hope you will. It is a

country you must see: perfection was born there, and it is itself perfection in another guise. Its crags and springs, its sky-, its river banks and shores, its barren mountains and its olive yards—will teach you as much as the Parthenon itself, the Delphi or the Olympian Hermes. But all these wonders can be realised only in the light which shines on them and seems to have created them. Just as, among men, beauty and purity should always go together. On the first I have already complimented you; do you deserve, I wonder, that I should do as much on the second? Can you bear witness to that virtue which is a thousand times more essential than beauty?”

“Why, yes, Father,” Georges said, astonished at the promptitude with which they had jumped from the purity of the Grecian sky to purity of *mores*.

“Your friendship with Lucien Rouvère seems to be an excessively close one. Has it never strayed from the narrow path?” Georges flushed. It seemed to him that Father de Trennes was really going rather too far. However, he managed to keep the sharpness out of his voice when he answered, “You are aware, Father, that for all such matters I have a director of conscience.” “Come now, Georges, my young friend, don’t be offended by my insistence. A man of breeding and manners should never blush—or rather, should never do anything apt to make him blush. Like Bayard, he should be fearless and without blemish. But when, unfortunately, he happens to have certain matters with which to reproach himself, I know perfectly well that he will hesitate to confess them if his director of conscience is an ordinary man. It follows that he should choose another, a man in his own caste. Is not the very word *caste* a synonym for *chastity*? To the pure, as the Apostle says, all things are pure.”

Georges recalled that preacher who had also, in his fashion, held forth at length upon “purity”, giving the word, in Latin, the same etymology as “boy”. Boys and purity could, it seemed, be served up with any sauce. He also remembered the full text of the sentence which Father de Trennes had only half quoted. “To the pure all things are pure, but nothing is pure to the impure.”

“I know boys,” the Father continued. “And that knowledge has made me understand a Greek sophism—that snow is black. What an illusion is their candour! Some of them will accuse themselves, at the tribunal of penitence, of nothing worse than being too fond of jam, while practising sins without name—such sins as St Paul would not—and how rightly—have so much as mentioned among Christians. It is, perhaps, only to prove that St Paul was right that the boys in question, while practising these very sins, prefer not to mention them, at least to their director of conscience.

“I was exasperated, on Saturday, as I watched your schoolfellows coming back from confession, all perfectly cool and collected. What I saw in their faces was not the soul’s peace, but the triumph of perversity. And indeed the hour of confession, when the whole secret life of this college should be laid bare, is, instead, the hour of utter fraud. My colleagues are not altogether to blame: how can a man who has never been a boy himself, not a real one, a man who has crushed the boy in himself by force of will and prayer, know how to question a boy? Occasions for sinning are so numerous—seven times a day for the righteous, according to scripture. And boys are so very unlike the righteous! They sin in their thoughts even more often than men, for they have more leisure and are more observant—yes, in their thoughts, by sight, hearing, when they cannot sin *de facto*.

“You have probably read neither the *Confessions* of St Augustine, nor those of St Peter Canisius, nor, certainly, the *Benedictine Customs* of Bee and Cluny.

“St Augustine, having given us some indications of the misdemeanours he committed with his playmates as a boy, adds the following, which reveals a great deal more: ‘Is this the supposed innocence of children? There is none such in them, Lord; my God’—he repeats himself—’there is none, and even today I ask Your forgiveness for having been one of those innocents.’ He concludes with a passage which is still stronger, although somewhat strange: it is to the effect that, in his opinion, when Our Lord declares that the Kingdom of Heaven shall belong to those who are like little children, he is not putting forward their supposed innocence as a model of virtue, but only their small size as a symbol of humility.

“That, then, is what the Father of the Latin Church has to say about it. St Peter Canisius, who, in the sixteenth century, was one of the reformers of Catholic education, is even more shattering in his admission of the errors and evil communications of his childhood; but it is perhaps as well to make some allowance of the holy exaggerations of humility. I confine myself to quoting his pertinent conclusion: ‘Lord, open the eyes of the teachers of our youth, that they may cease to be blind guides.’

“In the Middle Ages the monks of St Benedict had meditated St Augustine’s remarks and forestalled the prayer of St Peter Canisius. This is proved by the rules in their schools. There is, for example, the following: ‘Wherever the boys may be, they are forbidden to draw too near to each other . . .’ ‘In class, each boy must be given a separate seat, instead of a bench in common for all.’ Each pupil was never out of sight of his pedagogue, who slept in a bed beside the boy, at night.

“Nowadays, childish innocence is fashionable. Here, as elsewhere, this prejudice, favourable to every charming hypocrite, reigns supreme. The rules, like the laws, are unanimous in drawing their inspiration, in this article, from the celebrated *Maxima debetur puero reverentia*. This formula, which we owe to Juvenal, as you know, sums up the moral doctrine which Christendom inherited from the pagan world on the problem of childhood. Perhaps you have read Greek and Latin authors elsewhere than at St Claude’s. If you have not you will be apt to believe, following the worthy Juvenal, that children, in antiquity, were so respectable that they were notably worthy of respect. Yet, though I have been able to hint to you, without excessive shame, what the childhood of two great saints was like, I should hesitate to speak of the childhood of the greatest men of antiquity. And let us not blame nature for all these miseries: for all this is the fault of original sin.

“All of which, my dear Georges, will serve to show you how fragile a virtue is chastity. In the Life of St Bernardin of Siena, we read that ‘nobody, to whom God has not granted the gift of chastity, could be chaste’. But he says, also, that before He favours us with that gift, He requires that we ask it of Him. And even to that end we have to be able to ask it and to know how to ask it.

“Such thoroughness is rather beyond the strength of a boy of your age. If you remain alone, I mean without help either against yourself or others, you will succumb. It is necessary that an attentive and friendly eye keep watch over your heart. I will provide that eye.”

He smiled at his own words, and rose.

“Good night,” he said, pressing Georges’ hand. “Naturally, the offer I have just made you

applies equally to your friend. Let us be three friends together.”

Lucien seemed entertained when Georges retailed this rigmarole, but when Georges announced his intention of amusing Alexander with a like account, he advised discretion. It was their business, his and Georges', and nobody else's. They were old enough to have to answer to nobody, and to fear nobody. But Alexander would be unable to appreciate their interest in cultivating their relationship with Father de Trennes. And that interest was certainly piquant: here was one of their own masters turning the rules inside out for their benefit—the Rule of St Claude's, a matter of more import to them than that of Bee or Cluny. They were, it seems, to receive an object lesson in that doctrine of equivocations which had been discussed during a French lesson on an occasion when they were studying the *Provinciales*. They agreed, however, that they would as far as possible carry on this little intrigue together and in common. If one of them was awakened by the priest, he was to manage, somehow, to wake the other. As to his offer to hear their confessions, they would thank him very much all the same.

Bedtime seemed to them full of mystery. After prayers they glanced at each other with a conspiratorial air, anticipatory of the night's events. Georges felt disturbed when Father de Trennes passed quietly by his bed, his chaplet tapping against the buttons of his cassock. The sound receded: he could see the Father's shadow, elongated, on the far wall. The air of the dormitory seemed charged with the ideas he had evoked.

Here was a man who knew Greece—fatherland of “Alexander, the son of Philip”; consequently his prestige, in Georges' eyes, was great. He had beheld, with his own eyes,

those statues and buildings which were illustrated in the *Mythology* and in the *History of Antiquity*. One night, perhaps, he would even talk of the Cupid of Thespis. He must have seen that work in the Vatican, supposing Rome to have delayed him long enough on his way to Athens, in which case he would contrive a twist to introduce it into their conversation, even if that concerned the Pope himself.

Georges was sorry to have his thoughts turned from their unique preoccupation with Alexander. But at least he knew that he was not being in the least unfaithful to his friend. Had not the boy himself said, talking of Lucien, that there are friends *and* friends, and Father Lauzon, kisses *and* kisses? His intercourse with Father de Trennes was purely intellectual; despite the priest's own pretensions, the heart was not involved. Father de Trennes succeeded to Marc de Blajan, whose opinion of schoolboys, indeed, were the forerunners of the Father's own. Moreover, since Alexander had accepted the idea of Georges' friendship with Lucien, which had substance, he must implicitly accept this other, which had none.

Georges was surprised to find himself waking up in the morning at the same time as everyone else. There had been no nocturnal visit. Nor, during the day, did Father de Trennes pay the slightest attention to Lucien or himself. By evening their curiosity was all the more keenly aroused. Although unable to talk, they were very late in falling asleep. Georges had been ready to bet that the Father would come, but Lucien had been of the same opinion.

Waking in the morning, they realised that they had been wrong. They were almost disappointed. Was the Father, after all his advances, withdrawing, pouring cold water on their expectation of being admitted to share his treasures of erudition?

During study on Thursday, after returning from the weekly walk, Georges, copying out his account of it, dwelt on the fact that he was about to see Alexander again. That was enough to make him forget, at least for one day, the eloquence—and silence—of Father de Trennes. He was re-entering another world, where the Father could offer nothing but permission for him to leave the room when, presently, he asked for it.

However, he congratulated himself on having exercised restraint in fixing the number of his assignations with Alexander: he thought it as well to be moderate in soliciting favours of a man at once so subtle and so very eccentric. Any kind of dealings with him would entail too many vicissitudes to turn out well. Georges had had to be firm about that: on Friday, Alexander had pleaded for two weekly meetings, as at the beginning of their association; but, by a kind of intuition, Georges had insisted on the principle of one only, and that he had fixed for Thursdays—the idea of coming after their confessor was displeasing to him.

Alexander arrived at the conservatory still animated by the pleasure of the afternoon's expedition. His hair was rather untidy. Followed the pleasure of combing it—an operation which was now a permanent feature of their meetings.

His class had gone botanising in the woods. To Georges he said, "The flowers I gathered were for you. As I picked them I was saying, 'These violets are for him, and these lilies of the valley and this red squill—for him.' And here they are!"

He pulled a small bouquet from his pocket.

"It's a pity," he went on, "that it's wilted a bit. There's a spray of wistaria, too. I picked it on the way back, near a house." Hyacinth and wistaria were truly *ben trovato*, it was as if the boy had guessed what flowers in another conservatory had been put into the envelope of

his letter. Georges told him of it and, since it came aptly, recounted the legend of the beautiful Hyacinth from which came Apollo's name of Hyacinthian.

Laughing, Alexander said, "We will call the red squill *Hya-cinthus Georgianus*. I am very good at botany; as good as you in mythology. You've told me what a hyacinth is, but do you know what *Taraxacum* is? What, has the cat got your tongue? It's a dandelion. In my botany book I write the Latin names in red ink, so as to remember them better."

"Red is certainly our colour. By the way, I almost forgot my good wishes for your day—it's May 3rd, which, according to the *Martyrology*, is St Alexander's. I should have brought *you* a bouquet. You will have to make do with flowers of rhetoric. Oh, and incidentally, I discovered from my prayer-book that September 11th, your birthday, is the feast of St Hyacinth, Martyr. You are hyacinth in both our religions."

"Yes, but in both cases my blood gets spilt. Perhaps that's why red is my colour? I should have thought twice before adopting your tie."

Georges smiled.

"The colour has another meaning—in fact, two. I made a kind of allusion to the fact at our first meeting. *The Song of Songs*—I'm always talking to you about it!—teaches us that 'love has lamps of fire and flames'—that is, it is red. Besides which, in the Bible, sins are always scarlet—remember that preacher quoting the passage? Love, or sin—that was the choice confronting us; we made the better choice."

"But we didn't choose either. We chose friendship."

"What does the word matter? It means being fond of each other. In your notes, your canticle, and your letter, you said you loved me."

“I write it. I don’t say it.”

“But you do—in despite of yourself, for you’re blushing. Another red—the red of admission. But I hadn’t finished with St Alexander.

“At meditation yesterday I was pleased when the Superior spoke of ‘that great Pope, St Alexander, who governed the Church in the reign of the emperor Hadrian’. Well, that Sunday when you censured me I remember thinking that you might become Pope if you wanted to. I had no idea that you *had* been already. In the *Roman History* which the Superior lent me, I read that the emperor Hadrian had a young favourite called Antinous, whose beauty became famous—like Alexander himself—Alexander the Great, not the great Pope. And temples were erected to Antinous, after his death, as to Hyacinthus. I thought that had I been a Roman emperor and you my friend, I would have built temples for you but during your lifetime, so that you would have been a god on earth. That would have been better than being Pope. These were the things I was thinking of during meditation: Antinous made me love St Alexander, as Alexander had made me love Alexis, in one of Virgil’s eclogues.”

“Juventius, Antinous, Alexis, Hyacinthus,” said Alexander, counting on his fingers. “There are four of us.”

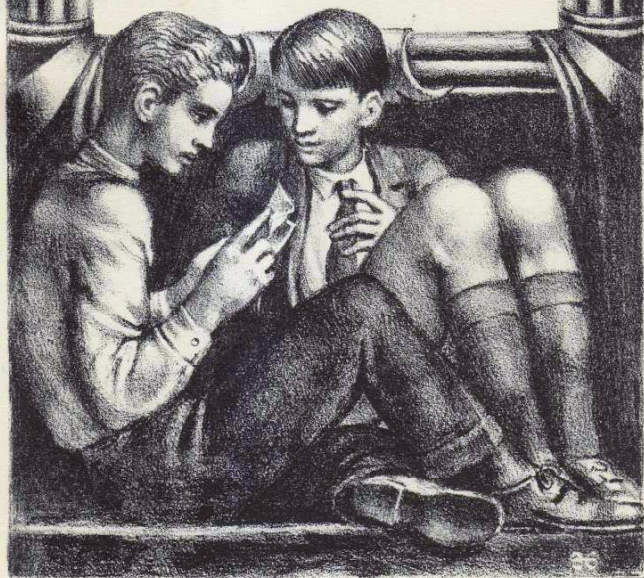


# PART 2

ROGER PEYREFITTE

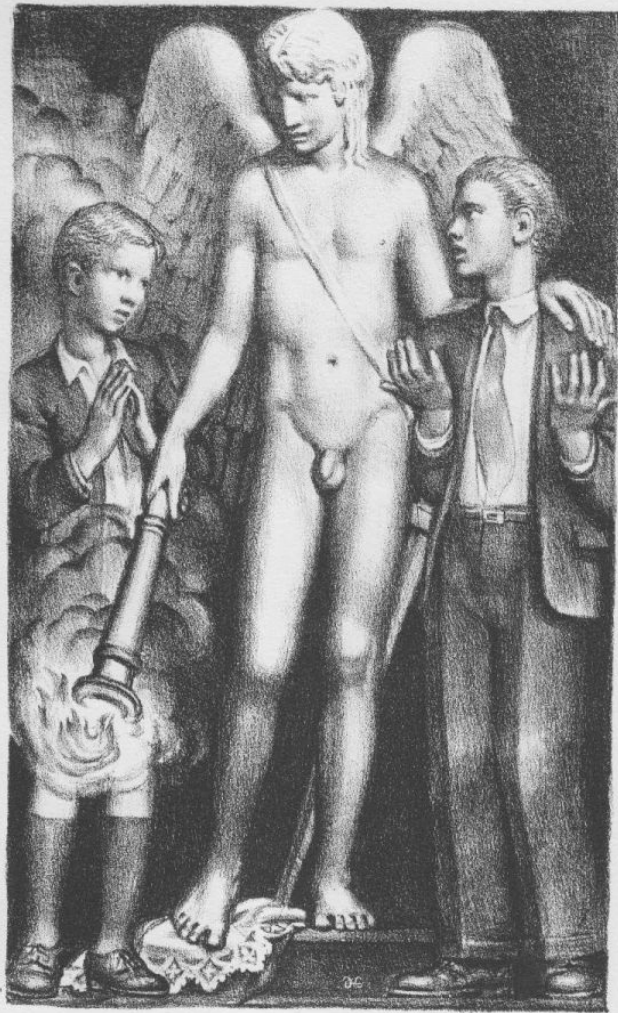
LES  
**AMITIÉS**  
PARTICULIÈRES

LITHOGRAPHIES DE GOOR











Georges and Lucien were in Father de Trennes' room. He was still holding a rose in his hand. It was by making them breathe in the scent of it that he had roused them. Georges had been the first to be submitted to this romantic operation, and had then watched it practised upon Lucien. Musset had written that children's lips "opened, at night, like roses": Father de Trennes opened their eyes, at night, with roses.

He had then begged the two boys to join him in his room for a chat—they would be more comfortable there. How could they refuse? He had urged them to make no noise, and to arrange their beds so that their absence would not be noticed. They had put on their slippers, but seeing them slipping jackets over their night things, he had asked them to remain as they were, in their pyjamas; if they were chilly he would switch on the electric radiator. And now, there they were, still feeling very surprised.

The Father had placed the rose in a vase and said, smiling, "*Rosa mystica*, the rose of our mysteries."

He had gently closed the curtained window which gave onto the dormitory. His bed had not been slept in. Beside the dressing-table, which bore a number of glass bottles and flasks, was a portable, rubber bath. On the table beside the lamp stood three glasses, a bottle of some liqueur, and a packet of biscuits. Having moved forward two chairs for his guests, the Father sat down facing them in a wicker armchair.

"Let me recall," he said, "the words of the psalmist. 'How good and sweet it is to live together with our brothers!'—*habit are fratres in unum*. This was a favourite maxim of the

Templars; and their persecutors interpreted it against them by giving it an infamous meaning. Any great brotherhood must expect such calumnies, if not actual persecution. I have brought the pair of you in here in order that our own may be preserved. Here we are not only more comfortable, but safer. I have checked, bed by bed, to make sure that everyone is asleep. Moreover, the time is favourable to us—it is the time of the first, and heaviest, sleep. Nevertheless, let us draw closer together and keep our voices lowered.”

The boys drew their chairs forward until their knees were almost touching his.

“During the day-time,” Father de Trennes continued, “I shall, as you will see, maintain analogous precautions. I shall have nothing to say to you, who interest me, but plenty to those who may amuse, but do not interest me—I mean your seniors, who think themselves already men, and your juniors, who feel themselves still children. In this way you will experience, even more keenly, the sense of being above all the others; and, by the same token, learn that true triumph is secret.” And he added, smiling again. “In my Father’s house are many mansions.”

He rose, uncorked the bottle, and poured out the liqueur. Georges asked him several questions about Greece: what were the people like, the hotels, food, roads, and whether it was still possible to find beautiful works of sculpture for sale. Father de Trennes replied very amiably. He also promised to order them a volume of Musset’s poetry—Lucien having said that he would like to read them since, according to Georges, he had had the honour to recall them to the Father’s mind.

“I see, and am pleased to see,” the Father said, “that you keep nothing from each other, just as I noticed that you kept apart from the other boys. So much intimacy on the one hand,

and discretion on the other, are exactly what must always attract and attach me.”

He gave his guests a final glass each of the liqueur, and then drew back to contemplate them at his ease.

“Just as I thought,” he said, “your pyjamas do not suit you as well as they might. Lucien’s would suit Georges better, for Georges is slimmer; Georges’ would look better on Lucien, who is stockier. Swap pyjamas tomorrow. As Pythagoras says, everything is common property between friends.”

He glanced at his watch and said, “I must remember your rest. You will leave me now, and return to the land of dreams. And how I should like to know what and who you dream of! Perhaps, tomorrow, by virtue of my idea, Georges will dream of Lucien and Lucien of Georges.”

He studied them, as he had on the first night-visit, and said, “Do not forget, and I shall never cease from repeating this, that purity is, in God’s eyes, the prime beauty and adornment of children, but it is also, too often, the only one which they lack.

At your age, that is, fourteen, St Nicholas of Tolentino kept himself chaste only by using chains, iron belts and a hairshirt, by fasting four times a week, and sleeping on the bare ground.

“Let us, by all means, honour him who has never failed to triumph over the evil one. Nevertheless, we must remember that the way of repentance is always open, for those who have fallen. The virginity of the heart can always be restored, and it is that which matters. In a great soul it is the very raging of vicious passions which heralds that grace which will follow and purify. Do not despair; you shall, in the slough of your wretchedness, find God

again, through me.”

It was Sunday and a troop of passing players was to give a performance of *Polyeucte*, a *Christian tragedy* in the great hall. Georges did not have a very high opinion of this play, which was in the curriculum of his class and had been copiously commented upon by le Tatou. He had, in this matter, the same opinion as the Hotel de Rambouillet. Nor was he particularly anxious to receive a lesson in the dramatic art, although he was hoping for a role in *Les Plaideurs*, which the seniors were doing for prize-giving. Nevertheless, he was delighted: *Polyeucte* would provide an occasion for seeing Alexander, just as *Les Plaideurs* would make an opportunity for showing off to him, and a better one, probably, than the academic ceremonies, of last March.

MM. les Cures of the surrounding parishes had been invited. When they filed in their rustic appearance and burly forms amused the youthful audience. They were given the front row—the row which the academicians, at the last assembly, had shared, gloriously, with the Cardinal; however, the armchairs had not, this time, been brought from the Superior’s rooms. A few rows behind MM. les Cures and in front of Georges, the latter could see the blonde nape of Alexander’s neck.

At last *Polyeucte* appeared, to be chided by Néarque. Every time such words as “God”, “Heaven”, “Christian” or “Baptism” were pronounced on the stage, the worthy village parsons broke into a round of applause, perceiving which the actors began enunciating any such propitious syllables with particular clarity. The boys hastened to emulate the visiting clergy, thereby almost bringing the house down. The Superior was obliged to turn round and

silence the uproar, a difficult feat, since he was clearly embarrassed by the danger of seeming to disapprove, severally and collectively, the actors' complaisant particularity, the guests' zeal, and the character of a tragedy which bore the epithet Christian and was, moreover, a work of the *grand siècle*. He was held in check in this matter of *Polyeucte* as he had been by Georges' postcard of the Cupid of Thespis (Vatican Palace).

Maurice, who was sitting not far from Georges, was whispering that they ought to organise a counter-demonstration, applauding such words as "Woman", "Lover", "Fine eyes", "Hymen". He did, indeed, tap the floor with his foot at these words, but discreetly; such was his witty protest, and he did not fail to make it at "Flesh", "Jupiter", and "Pleasure".

It was in a stentorian voice that the worthy Felix uttered the last line of the play:

*Et faire retentir partout le nom de Dieu.*

The French master had said, when they were doing the play in class, "Notice that the play ends with the word 'God'"

They could hardly have failed to notice it that day. In the general confusion of leaving the hall Georges managed to work his way up to Alexander, who was looking for him. Glad of the chance to defy heaven and earth, he exchanged a few words with the boy. Polyeucte's very ardour had passed into him, and not Father Lauzon himself could have prevented him.

On the night of the following day Georges and Lucien again found themselves in Father

de Trennes' room. It was after midnight.

"You will forgive me for the unsuitable time," he said, "but just as I was on my way to awaken you I found one of your schoolfellows calmly smoking a cigarette in the window embrasure. That is what comes of leaving windows open at night, as is usual nowadays. The scent of lilacs, rising from the courtyard, disturbs many a boy's sleep. I confiscated the smoker's cigarettes, and I suggest we smoke them for his sake. I put him on his knees, as I did you the other night; and he was, there-after, very slow in falling asleep again. It was that which made me so late."

They took a cigarette each and Lucien said, "But don't you ever sleep yourself, Father?"

"A few hours are enough for me," the priest replied. "Or perhaps I should say I can be satisfied with very little. But I do demand that satisfaction, even in very little things. I suggested that you swap pyjamas, instead of which both of you have put on clean ones, which, however, suit you better than the others. To teach you to be more biddable, I have removed the dirty ones from your respective linen-bags and replaced them, in your linen-drawers, with new pyjama suits of approximately the right size—I happened to have them in a suitcase destined for two of my nephews. By way of mortification, you will lie to your respective families, by telling them the change was due to a mistake on the part of the wardrobe sister."

With that he filled their glasses and handed round biscuits: the incident was closed.

"Although your confidence in me," he continued, "is not yet equal to mine in you, I could not, now, do without you. Before I give anyone my affection, I study his face very carefully. I studied all your fellows in this way, as well as yourselves, and it was you I chose. And

every night that choice is more thoroughly vindicated. I sit down for a moment beside your beds, switching on my torch from time to time, the better to admire you. With what impatience do I wait for that moment! I prepare myself for it as for a festival. Did not Socrates himself, as he tells us, make himself fine when he was going to call on a beau? But there is this difference between him and myself, that my chief care is in shaving. Have you noticed what negligence, worthy less of Socrates than of the Cynic philosophers, my colleagues affect in that article? Some of them shave only on Sundays, before High Mass. My own ceremonial is different: I shave not only in the morning, for everyone, but in the evening, for you. It is my wish to present myself before your eyes, though they may be closed in sleep, before the mirror, though it be veiled, of your boyish souls, before your faces, immaculate and defenceless in sleep, as a man who respects himself.”

Georges could not help smiling at such exquisite refinements over a day’s growth of beard; mildly ironical, he quoted, “*Saintes douceurs du del, adorables idées!*”

This echo of *Polyeucte* set all three of them laughing—the Father probably wishing to prove that he could take a joke. But thereafter—possibly wishing to prove that he also knew how to change the subject—he steered the conversation round to the previous evening’s performance. He gave the boys an account of their clerical guests’ dinner in the dining-room used for such entertainment, at which meal he had kept them company. They had been kept confined to that room, probably with a view to shielding them, for as long as possible, from the boys’ mischief. They were excluded from the refectory as if it had been Bluebeard’s secret chamber. The Father depicted, for his young guests, the parish clergy’s parochial manners—the table-napkins tied round fat necks, the lip-smacking after drink, the plates

tipped with the left hand and the gravy sedulously wiped up with the right, chicken drumsticks brandished at arm's length. The conversation was of the same order: one of Father de Trennes' neighbours at table had questioned him closely concerning the local eel-fishing; the other had been quite as pressing in the matter of the forthcoming beatification of the first Red Indian saint, announced in a newspaper.

Georges, meanwhile, was rejoicing in the fact that the priest's conversation had not, on this occasion, taken an insidious turn. He was all the more surprised at this in that, judging by the conclusion of their last interview, he was expecting a lecture on the "raging of the vicious passions"—the expression, recalled, had several times sent himself and Lucien into fits of laughter, although Lucien, for his part, preferred "in the slough of your wretchedness".

Father de Trennes made an end of his jesting:

"My stories amuse you—I do not refer to the Redskin saint—and you will forget them as quickly as Thucydides' and Sallust's. What will count with you, what will be recalled of your college days, will be memories of a very different order, and by which your whole lives will be marked—complicity in a look, the gleam from a head of hair, the fullness and clear red of a lip, the warmth of a hand ..And turning to Georges he demanded, "Who was the boy you spoke to yesterday, after the play?"

"Maurice Motier's brother."

"You know him well?"

"Oh, you know—no better than anyone else."

"A pity. I should be ready to congratulate you on such a friendship; it would be doubly worthy of you—because you would have kept it secret, and because the boy is one of the

loveliest works ever to be shaped by the hand of God.”

Father de Trennes was very apt to conclude a speech with the name of God, like *Polyeucte*, or with something like it. But Georges, reflecting on this fact back in bed some time later, was by no means reassured. He was not so simple as to think himself the sole reason for the priest's interest in Alexander. He was beginning to understand the character of a man whose every word and act concealed some purpose. He was aware that Alexander now had a place in this man's mind and that Father de Trennes suspected the liaison. The archaeologist had deciphered the inscription, reconstructed the temple. Georges was paying dearly for the boldness which he had derived from Corneille and which had betrayed him. He himself had provoked this new threat to his friendship with Alexander. The threat emanated from one whose discretion was assured; yet he was now more uneasy than he had been last time. The Superior, and Father Lauzon, had, in their fashion, worked only good. But what, exactly, *was* Father de Trennes? This question, which Georges had been asking himself ever since his first brush with the priest, remained unanswered. At all events, he promised himself that there would be no question—Alexander being added to Lucien—of “Let us be four friends together”. Despite the opinion of Pythagoras, he would beg the Father to set a limit to his friendship. Better still, he would contrive to have this particular subject of conversation avoided. He would so manage as to prevent Alexander's name being involved in digressions, however pious or learned, on purity and antiquity. He and his friend needed no help or intercession with either the angels, or the gods.

When, on the following Thursday, he asked permission to leave the room, he noticed that the Supervisor of Studies watched him, smiling slightly, all the way to the door. There could

be no question but his assignation was guessed; it followed that his intrigue was discovered, as he had feared. Father de Trennes' discretion, since Monday, had been perfect; but not because he had forgotten. He had certainly noted that Georges, who rarely asked permission to leave the room, always did so at the same time every Thursday. Georges blamed himself for not having foreseen that this must happen.

Alexander's presence did not succeed in dissipating the uneasiness he was experiencing. He seemed to see Father de Trennes beside Alexander as, in the dormitory, beside Lucien.

Their respective Supervisors of Studies were, one way or another, in league against them. Alexander was obliged to be careful of his, for he had, apparently, noticed and disapproved the length of the boy's last absence; for, when giving him permission to leave the room on this occasion, he had made him a warning sign. Alexander, of course, was ready to defy the world, but Georges was more determined than ever to avoid all complications. He did not wish to reinforce Father de Trennes' suspicions by a prolonged absence; he told Alexander that a difficult piece of preparation forced him to cut short their meeting. It was the excuse which Alexander had used, on occasion, with Father Lauzon, so that he could keep his date with Georges. Georges considered changing the day and hour of the next meeting in the hope of putting the Supervisor off the scent; but he had to face the fact that it was too late for this to serve any purpose.

Up in the dormitory he was tormented by the memory of the spoilt meeting with Alexander. It was not merely that today's pleasure had been ruined; his whole happiness was in danger. It was a pity he could not talk to Lucien: that would have restored his confidence. And he began to be sorry that he had left Alexander's notes at home; he would have stayed

awake as long as necessary to read them under cover of the bed-clothes. That, perhaps, might have helped him to exorcise the vision which obsessed him. For him, henceforth, all the time spent in the dormitory belonged to Father de Trennes. And he no longer awaited the Father with either impatience or curiosity; he awaited him with apprehension, dwelling upon the idea of the well-shaven priest, stooping over him as he slept.

The whole thing began to be very tiresome: the oriental subtlety of being summoned from sleep by the scent of a rose was no longer to his taste. He had wanted to cry "Confound your rose!" but in point of fact had obediently followed, with Lucien, to the priest's room; he should never have consented to enter it at all if he objected to being, as it were, forced to return to it. He foresaw that he would be questioned about that evening's assignation, and he did not feel in a mood to answer questions amiably.

"I woke you up," Father de Trennes announced, "in order to give you some good news. Tomorrow morning I am to celebrate mass not, as we supervisors do, during the first lesson period, but during the general mass, in the gallery on our side—I have arranged matters with the Prefect—and I shall have two choir-boys: Lucien Rouvère and Georges de Sarre."

He seemed to be uncommonly pleased.

"You will never guess," he added, "what I had to do to accomplish so simple an end. But there, the moment one does anything to interfere in the slightest way with college routine, it's quite a business! I said that you had expressed a desire to serve mass for me on that particular day as a result of a special devotion you had to St Pancras, whose day it is tomorrow. That saint, a native of Phrygia the impure, Ganymede's country, was martyred at

fourteen years of age, and I feel sure that I foresaw your own wishes in making him your patron. It is, indeed, that very assurance which justifies my pious untruth. It is said, moreover, that an effort was made to save him from torture and martyrdom not only because of his youth, but because of his beauty. And indeed your own youth and beauty would seem to designate you for pleasures rather than pains—pleasures of but a moment's duration which, supposing you to die in that same moment, would condemn you to pain eternal. May you, with the help of St Pancras, remain firm against their seduction! May your friendship never degenerate!"

Here, then, was yet another fourteen-year-old saint: starting with St Placidius, college friendships were not in want of patron-protectors. Father de Trennes' lists were as full as last October's preacher's, and his stories no more lacking in interesting matter. The two priests used almost identical language, indeed, yet Father de Trennes' woke very different echoes. There seemed to be a great gap between St Placidius or St Edmond, and St Pancras or St Nicholas of Tolentino; that is to say, the manner in which the former had been presented to them in no way resembled that in which they had been introduced to the latter. When the Supervisor of Studies spoke of chastity, he never failed to explain that he meant the chastity of the heart. And when he spoke of beauty it was clear that he did not mean the same thing as October's preacher had done. He seemed to concentrate mainly on earthly beauty, and if he did happen to raise his eyes heavenwards, was he seeing St Pancras borne aloft by angels, or rather, perhaps, Ganymede borne aloft by an eagle?

He resumed: "I shall, then, have the happiness of administering the Holy Eucharist to you. That communion should be, for you, the most important in your lives; it will, indeed, be

in very truth your most solemn communion. You will, therefore, prepare for it by a full confession.”

He pointed to the prie-dieu, on which the stole and surplice were laid out in readiness. Georges was taken aback. The difference which he had predicated between the sermons of Father de Trennes and those of the Dominican preacher was as nothing to the difference which he perceived between a confession there and then in that room, and his first confession at St Claude's in Father Lauzon's room. Clearly he was confronted by a deliberate trap. The Supervisor of Studies had not renewed his offer to direct Georges' conscience only because he had been preparing this opportunity. One could, of course, simply withhold the truth; but it would be wiser to avoid questioning altogether, for he was dealing with a man of very different calibre from Father Lauzon. If his dialectic, like some of his principles, derived from Socrates, he must be a formidable confessor. And having made up his mind to parry every direct thrust in the matter of Alexander, Georges had no intention of falling into an ambush in the confessional. As a penitent he might be of base metal, yet he insisted that his confessor be sterling. These and similar reasons nearly led him to refuse the Father's offer to serve his mass; but he judged it wiser to compromise. He said, “You must excuse me, Father. I will be your acolyte with pleasure, but no confession is called for. I feel that I am in a proper state to communicate tomorrow.”

Lucien hastened to echo his friend. The Supervisor, who had made a move towards the prie-dieu, whipped round to face them.

“What!” he exclaimed. “Are you refusing to obey me?”

“There is no question of disobeying you,” Georges said, “but the proof that we have very

little on our conscience—I think I may speak for my friend as well as myself—is that we take holy communion every morning.”

“Perfidious argument! Don’t think the wool can be pulled over my eyes! Have you forgotten that? It is I who have had to forget what I know of you and your like when I have seen you preparing to receive the holy wafer. A fine spectacle, indeed, worthy of those returns from confession I have witnessed, and described to one of you two!” And, on a note of bitter sarcasm, pacing the room, he continued, “Oh, yes! All these spectacles are hymns of apology, poems of benediction. But there is a different hymn, another poem I should dearly love to compose, a paean to sing and celebrate the purity of schoolboys. Oh, it would contain some choice rhymes, I promise you—*puerperal* and *baptismal*; *eburnean* and *nivean*; *adamantine* and *crystalline*; *mirific* and *seraphic*.”

Halting before his guests he said, furiously, “Go to your beds, you and your purity!”

They rose, and were already at the door when, gently, he recalled them and they at once realised that his anger had evaporated.

“Boys,” he said, smiling, “are like cats; they are always distrustful and they love nobody. Yet one cannot help being fond of them.

“Do not go until we have at least said a prayer together, in order to call down Divine peace on tomorrow’s mass. I am ready to believe, despite my experience, that you are in no need of my aid and that you have told me the truth.”

He went to the prie-dieu and knelt down between his two companions. Having made the sign of the cross he began a prayer, the two boys making the responses.

“And if,” he concluded, in a low voice, “if you have lied to me, ask God’s forgiveness

from the bottom of your hearts.”

He took each of them by the hand and remained thus, still and mute, for a moment, as if he were offering them up as a sacrifice.

When the time came for chapel, Georges and Lucien fetched their missals and followed Father de Trennes up the narrow stairway to the gallery. While the Supervisor went apart to turn his thoughts to God, they lit the candles and made all ready, setting out the two silver vases which had been filled with roses—“The mystical roses,” as Lucien said.

While busy with these tasks Georges turned his eyes towards the junior division, below and opposite. From the gallery he could see Alexander almost as well as when they were placed opposite each other. Distances seemed shorter than they did below. No doubt his friend would think to look up to the gallery when he noticed that Georges was not in his usual place. He would think that Georges had not forewarned him with the idea of giving him a surprise, as he himself had given Georges a surprise on the first evening of term.

Standing by the little table which did duty as vestry, Father de Trennes, helped by his two acolytes, put on his sacerdotal garments. Never, hitherto, had Georges paid any attention to the Latin phrases which accompanied this ceremony. Father de Trennes pronounced each syllable distinctly. First, while putting on the white ornaments—amict and alb—he exorcised “the assaults of the devil” and asked to be “washed white in the blood of the Lamb”. Then he circled his waist with the cord, in order to “extinguish, in his loins, the humour of sensuality”. Next, little by little, he was draping himself with red, the maniple on his arm being symbolical of the “jets of pain and joy”, the stole about his neck signifying

“immortality”; and last the chasuble, the supreme sign of his ministry, signifying “a mild yoke and a light burden”.

When he turned about it seemed to Georges that he had been transformed. He was no longer Father de Trennes, the archaeologist of youth and supervisor of hearts, but a priest of Jesus Christ.

On the preceding evening Georges had had occasion to recall his first confession at St Claude’s; now he thought of the first mass which he had served there. Then, too, Lucien had been with him, but the Superior had been the celebrant, and it had been done in honour of St Tarsicius, the acolyte who had died for his God. St Pancras had died for this same God. There were others who had died for other gods.

And as for themselves, what were they about here and now, all three of them? Of what religion were they celebrating the rites? Was the God they were honouring really their God? Was this priest really His priest? Was he worthy to make himself splendid with blood of martyrs, and to wash himself white in the blood of the Lamb? Was it not he, himself, who had put roses into those vases, to recall his nocturnal visits to the dormitory, his strange words, and the no less strange hospitality of his room? And were not his two acolytes more worthy of him than of SS. Pancras and Tarsicius? Formerly they would have been struck by lightning, or the earth would have opened and swallowed them up, and heavenly voices would have drowned the words “I will wash my hands among the innocents.”

Georges, turning after handing the water, cast a glance down into the body of the chapel and his dearest wish was granted: Alexander had seen him and had smiled. He must be watching for Georges’ appearances above the balustrade, as he, himself, had once been

watched for, in the other gallery, Georges no longer felt himself to be in a mystical state. He turned back to his duties full of indifference towards matters supernatural. He had found his true faith again: faith in his friendship. It was not merely the altitude lent by his presence in the gallery which enabled him to look down on the whole college. His was a secret triumph, more complete than that promised him by Father de Trennes. He was an outlaw, living beyond the Father's discipline, beyond the discipline of the college and, during holidays, of his own family. Despite his mysterious smile as Georges had left the study-room the previous evening, the Supervisor had not, thank

God, reverted to the subject of Alexander during the night. And now, by way of encouragement, Georges had received another smile in the very chapel itself.

The name of St Pancras now reminded him of the song "Les noces de la fille du president Fallieres". The three lines in question had not come to mind since the feast of St Ignace, at the beginning of the February which had brought him Alexander:

*Le grand-père Ignace*

*Le cousin Pancrace L'oncle Celestin.*

Georges turned the pages of his missal to see whether St Celestin featured in it. He did, and quite soon, May 19th. Soon, then, the song would be over.

The moment for communion had come. Georges felt himself moved again. The priest asked for "the word which heals" and his sacerdotal status gave him the right to receive it. The act which he was accomplishing could not be a parody. He turned slowly towards

Georges and Lucien, who had taken up their places side by side. Pyx in hand, he looked away, in the general direction of Alexander. He raised the shining Host, bright against the background of his red chasuble, itself framed between the silver altar vases.

On the evening of the following day Georges alone was honoured, but without flowers; he was awakened by flashlight. Probably the Father was playing a parody of the Wise Virgin, with her lamp lit. He was already seated beside Georges, who immediately weighed the difficulty of rousing Lucien, in spite of their agreement. Father de Trennes said:

“I greatly enjoy the moment when you wake up. Those fine eyes blinking, the little grimace of annoyance, and one cheek redder than the other—the one you sleep on. What is more, by a miracle of the barber’s art, your hair is almost as tidy as if it had just been combed. Only your fair lock, which one only sees the tip of in the daytime, comes into the open, as if for a breath of fresh air.”

Father de Trennes switched on his torch again to take another look at this interesting phenomenon. That same day, as it happened, Georges had slipped away during break to renew the fairness of that single lock of hair with the chemical which he kept locked in his toilet box.

“To what,” the Father inquired, “do you owe the singular blondness of one lock of hair?”

Exasperated, Georges briefly recounted the tale of the accident with a hairwash.

“I had thought,” Father de Trennes said, “that we had to do with a natural fairness. Is that the only lock you ever bleached?” “Yes,” Georges replied.

“There is, in your wallet, a lock of the same colour which you appear to preserve with

particular care. I had supposed it cut from your own hair. It appears, however, that it is a relic of some other fair head?"

Georges had sat up abruptly.

"What!" he exclaimed, "you dared to look in my wallet?" The despair which his own helplessness reduced him to, however, overcame his indignation. His head fell back on the pillow and his eyes filled with tears. He had been cunningly outmanoeuvred and now saw himself and Alexander this man's prisoners. The two friends had escaped the Superior and Father Lauzon, only to fall into *his* hands.

The priest was gently stroking Georges' forehead.

"You mustn't cry like that, silly child!" he whispered. "I should not be so indiscreet if you were less secretive, and you have no right to bear me a grudge. Nor am I angry with you. Did I not congratulate you on having succeeded in keeping your intrigue a secret? From that moment on you had no reason to hide anything from me. You have not yet realised that whatever I may learn about you will remain strictly between ourselves, and that I insist on knowing everything, not in order to punish you, but to enlighten you. I tell you again, you are surrounded by a thousand dangers and do not even realise it. That is why you must be on your guard. I am enamoured of your purity, like in the psalm 'The King is enamoured of your beauty'. And purity is the beauty of the angels. I paraphrased that for you one night.



“We are sharing roles: you are my angel, I your guardian. Do not seek to guard yourself against your guardian. You and the boy you love need never fear that I shall exceed the limits of my authority. I behave in the manner of Theogonis towards his young pupil Cynos—’I cross the ramparts, but do not ravage the town’.

“Were I more presumptuous I should compare myself to certain glorious servants of God such as St Romuald or St John of Quenti who, tempted by certain viands in the midst of their austerities, caused them to be brought before them that they might contemplate them even more greedily, before sending them away. They were applying the Stoic precept—’However ardent your thirst, do no more than gargle’. I am quite able to bear with my own hunger and thirst.”

Rising, the priest took a small package from his pocket. He said, “For your Thursday evenings, here are some cigarettes. They will make you think of me. They are better than the others we had. They come from Egypt, where I bought them.”

Georges would have liked to throw his Egyptian cigarettes in his face. In what aspect of Alexander was the man interested? In his purity or in his beauty? What was he trying to find out and how far would his investigations go? Like the Superior, he pried into people’s wallets and claimed that one must have no secrets from him. What a piece of luck that he had left those notes at home, the very notes which, only recently, he was wishing he had brought with him after all.

He found some reassurance in the thought that Alexander was protected by being in the

junior school. The obstacles between seniors and juniors which he had cursed so often when they obstructed his own ends, now seemed to him providential. The very idea of Father de Trennes sitting down beside Alexander's bed was enough to drive him mad. Georges was perfectly ready to hold his tongue about the Supervisor where only himself was concerned. But in the other case—purely imaginary, thank God—he would have denounced the priest and roused the whole dormitory.

During the next few days Father de Trennes behaved as if he were trying to get himself forgotten. He managed never even to glance at his chosen pair, and he left them to sleep in peace. He seemed, also, to be detaching himself from the school community, for during some breaks he was replaced by the former Supervisor of Studies.

Nevertheless Georges was nervous when, during Thursday evening study, he asked permission, as usual, to leave the room; the Father granted it with an absent-minded look.

Greetings over, Alexander said, "I've something to tell you." His voice was serious.

"Am I to remove to a distance, as on one famous occasion?" Georges inquired, laughing.

"That isn't necessary. All I want to ask you is what you think of Father de Trennes."

That name in his mouth!

"Why do you ask?" Georges said; he was managing to keep calm, as he had done when Father de Trennes had first questioned him about Alexander.

"I saw Maurice on Sunday. He told me this Father de Trennes was very nice, gave him good advice, and sometimes, at night, asked him to his room to drink a liqueur and eat biscuits. Then he advised me to take advantage of this myself, make my way to the Father's

room, not at night, of course, but in break, when the Father stays in his room. As you can imagine, I told Maurice exactly what I thought of this. But he asked me to think it over and not to mention it to anyone, especially not Father Lauzon, who might be offended, he being my confessor. Doesn't all this strike you as a bit strange?"

While Alexander had been speaking Georges' first amazement was giving place to a profound disgust. He was sorry for this priest, and he despised him; sworn by his very vocation to truth, he lived by lies. The boys were liars, yes, but in defence of what was theirs, not in an effort to take what belonged to others. Father de Trennes deceived not only the masters, but the boys, and even the boys he was supposed to be fond of. He thought himself very clever; but now, unknown to himself, he was unmasked.

And yet, was it really unknown to himself? Surely he could not have failed to realise that the boy would reveal his machinations to Georges and that Georges would, in consequence, learn exactly what his assurances, given that last night, were worth? And probably he cared nothing about that. He had wanted to show, perhaps, that, one way or the other, he always gained his point. But his initiatives were always so disconcerting that it would, perhaps, be wise to give him the benefit of the doubt in just the very case where he seemed not to deserve it. Perhaps he had intended nothing worse than bringing Georges and Alexander together, in his room, as he habitually brought Georges and Lucien together. But he was mistaken if he supposed that such a surprise would give Georges any pleasure. It was as repugnant to him as the idea which had come to him in the dormitory when he thought of Father de Trennes and Alexander together; in fact it horrified him.

"I am not altogether surprised," he said, "Father de Trennes is more or less dotty. We've

quite lost count of the mad things he does. It's important to give him a wide berth."

"Rouvère and you served mass for him, so you must be on pretty good terms with him."

"Not at all. He dragooned us into it, under the impression he was doing us an honour, as well as St Pancras. My guess, now, is that he was putting people off the scent. I mean, by your own account, it's your brother Maurice who's his favourite, and *he's* never served mass for him."

When Georges returned to senior study Father de Trennes beckoned him. Did he want to make sure that Georges had been smoking his cigarettes, or to ask about his meeting with Alexander? Georges walked up the steps of the dais, remembering the punishment which had awaited him on the day he had overstayed his time with Alexander. Was Father de Trennes now going to add to his general confusion by punishing him again? But all he said was, "You will be reader in the refectory at dinner."

The task of reading aloud during meals was usually confided only to boys in the highest classes, selected by the Prefect of Studies. Nobody in the third form had ever done this duty before.

Georges wondered what the object of this new manoeuvre could be. The Father was making himself seem agreeable to him by this extraordinary favour, which would likewise give pleasure to Alexander. Moreover he perceived the advantage of, as it were, reshuffling the cards by putting in this counterpoise to Alexander's probable revelations. Or, perhaps, he enjoyed playing the part of a mere intermediary, for his own amusement or edification, without bothering to explain. Even if this were so, Georges was nevertheless determined not

to lend himself to Father de Trennes' whims excepting in so far as doing so might, as in the present case, be within the rules.

Excepting on Sundays there was rarely *Deo Gratias* at dinner, and no doubt the Father had made sure that there would be no such exception today. What excuse could he have given his friend the Superior when asking that question? And to the Prefect, to persuade him to choose Georges?

During this month of Mary they were reading *The Lives of the Saints*, whereas they had read *The Life of the Holy Virgin* in the second term. The reason was that since the morning Meditations were devoted to the mysteries of the rosary, the Superior was not dealing with his usual subject which, at least as regards the principal saints, was thus being dealt with in the refectory readings. This might have given Father de Trennes the idea of telling the Prefect that Georges, not satisfied with St Pancras only, had made a cult of that day's, particular saint. But who was he? There were two possibles: St Venant, whose feast it was, martyred at fifteen—one of the young saints named by the Dominican preacher; or, on the other hand, whatever saint the Superior had chosen for the reading—it would not be St Venant since he was not an important one. They had only just done with St John-Baptist de la Salle, an even greater educational reformer than St Peter Canisius had been. Georges felt sorry that *Tartarin de Tarascon* was no longer the refectory hero. He it was who, to everyone's great satisfaction, had succeeded the Holy Virgin and the virtuous *Décalogne*. The Superior introduced some variety into the readings but, so far as Georges, who had read the work, could judge, *Tartarin* had been pretty well expurgated for refectory reading. The Superior bowdlerised the dead, as well as the living.

Summer made possible a break out of doors, before dinner. Georges, having told Lucien what had happened, added that, henceforth, he would refuse to go to the Father's room at night. Father de Trennes would surely not drag him there by main force? As soon as the Father woke him and began talking, he was going to turn away from him, on his other side. He had had all he wanted of a man who blew hot and cold and, if he persisted, would not hesitate to tell him what he thought of him. Father de Trennes had talked of nobility, gentlemanliness; he would receive a lesson in what it meant.

"I think," Lucien said, "it's about time to pull out, as you say. Alexander has done us a considerable service. The Father quoted a thing from the Gospels—'In my Father's house are many mansions.' Well, we now know that in *this* Father's house there are many—chamberlains. Since you and I weren't enough for him, you can be quite sure he won't stop at Maurice, either. His chosen boys, his nephews, the pyjamas, faces—all in the same bag.

"He's lied to us. He's doing just the opposite of what he said—he's taking an interest in other chaps, and making fools of *us*. We hadn't got on to him. He must have a rota system in waking chaps up. It'll soon be an open secret and somebody'll catch it. André was expelled because of me. You'll run the risk of being expelled because of Alexander. Well—*ad patres* with Father de Trennes! Up the sons and down the Fathers!"

At the end of the break Georges damped and combed his hair at the fountain. He had no need of lavender hair-oil: this was not for Alexander. He was not sorry, however, that he had taken pains over his toilet that morning: the care he had taken with his assignation in mind would now turn to account in a public satisfaction for his vanity.

He was hoping that he would read as well as he had done on the mid-Lent occasion. He

thought of those wretched refectory readers whose performance provoked the Superior to ring his bell and utter a peremptory “Too loud!” or “Louder!” or even, if the reader’s emphasis was misapplied, “Try and understand what you’re reading!”

When Georges went up to the lectern, the junior schoolboys were already in their places, with their backs turned to him, waiting for grace to be said. Then, while everyone was sitting down, the Superior beckoned Georges to come and fetch the book. Nothing had yet attracted Alexander’s attention to the evening’s reader, and Georges went down from the dais amidst the noise of opening and shutting drawers, the clatter of cutlery on marble. On his way past the junior tables Georges was able to nudge Alexander and then, back at the lectern, to enjoy the surprise he had caused. Alexander was a picture of ill-contained delight, but Georges’ own expression was a model of discreet gravity: for, at the masters’ table, in the seniors’ side of the room, were Father Lauzon and Father de Trennes.

*Lives of the Saints.* The marked page was headed: “Saint Ber-nardin of Siena. Feast, May 20th”. May 20th was, however, the day after tomorrow: they seemed to be running ahead of the calendar. Georges recalled Father de Trennes’ quotation, taken from the *Life* of this saint, regarding chastity. Even here he was having chastity thrust at him.

As was customary, Lucien brought him a tumbler of water. Georges set it on the shelf below the lectern, between a *Martyrology* and an *Imitation*. The *Martyrology* was read at luncheon, the *Imitation* at dinner.

The place in the *Imitation* was marked by a scented card—the readers, it seemed, had their little refinements—and by a fingernail mark at the line where the reading had ended last night.

The Superior was being kind: he was giving the new reader time to get ready, and run an eye over the text. Georges took advantage of it to look, covertly, at Alexander. He had an even better view of him than he had had from the chapel gallery. Alexander was helping himself to soup from the tureen, and all his grace and charm were revealed in that simple movement. Then he stared hard at Georges and, under cover of taking a spoonful of soup, sent him a kiss.

At least Father de Trennes could not see Alexander, so that his watchfulness would not be able to spoil the boy's pleasure, however much it might bother Georges himself. And it seemed to Georges that he was being held up there, above the rest, by the steady stares of Alexander on the one hand, and the priest on the other. He was between the spirit of light and the spirit of darkness, between Ormuzd and Ahriman, like some sectary of that Mithras of whom he had spoken to his cousins.

The bell at last: the Superior had made up his mind. Georges began to read:

*Saint Bernardin of Siena, Friar Minor of the Observance, apostle of Italy, feast May 20th. Bernardin was born on September 8th, 1830, the birthday of the Holy Virgin, at Siena, in Tuscany, and not, as some have written, at Massa Carrara . . .*

Followed some particulars of his family, childhood and studies (at thirteen he had finished his philosophy courses). The Superior had crossed out two sentences: *He had kept his chastity intact despite the dangers to which his exceptional beauty exposed him. His schoolmates did not dare to utter dissolute words in his presence, and when they saw him*

*draw near, they would say, "Let us not talk of that any longer, here comes Bernardin."* Yet the boys of St Claude's would hardly have been surprised to learn that fourteenth-century boys sometimes talked together in a reprehensible fashion; they were already aware, if only from the anecdote concerning St Edmond used in one of the Retreat sermons, that in the twelfth century, likewise, boys' conversations were not invariably modest and decent.

The passage quoted by Father de Trennes had also been crossed out: The Father, apparently got his quotations from unexpurgated and unabridged editions. But the Superior had left in, no doubt by way of example, the story which Georges was now reading, not without compunction; Father de Trennes, probably, would have cut *this* passage:

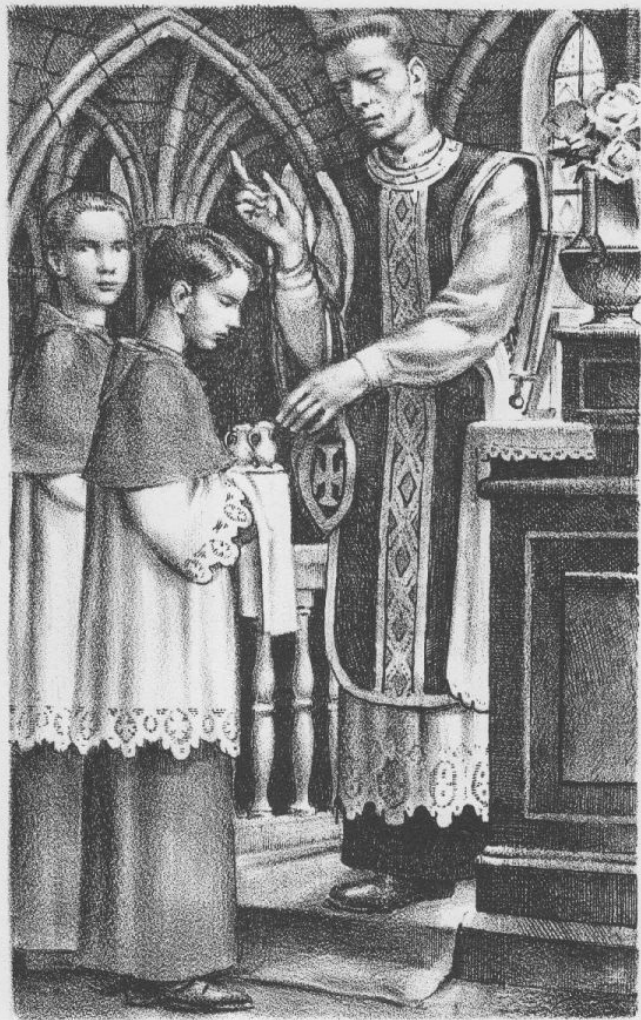
*A man of quality having put a shameful proposition to a group of schoolboys, Bernardin, most gentle and amiable of lads, carried away by holy rage, shut his mouth with a blow of his fist so violent that the whole street rang with the sound. The noble libertine, thus becoming a laughing-stock to the spectators, withdrew in confusion, but this chastisement led him to mend his ways. Subsequently he sought every occasion to hear Bernardin preach and at every sermon melted into tears.*

During every pause, and even while reading, Georges glanced at Alexander. Above the heads of masters and boys, and in spite of Father Lauzon and Father de Trennes, he was establishing a subtle tie with the boy whom he was caressing with his voice. Alexander would surely be listening only to the voice, not to the reading. Georges, too, had his reward; he was discovering new aspects of the friend he knew so well. He already possessed

pictures of Alexander in chapel, in study, in the corridors, in break, in the train, on the terrace and in the conservatory. Now he could add to them pictures of Alexander breaking a piece of bread with both hands, or with one only, pressing the bread against the table; drinking from his tumbler down to the last drop, exposing the fair skin of his throat, or just sipping from the edge, like a bird; dispatching his extra meat—they both took extra meat; and eating cherries whose colour merged with that of his lips.

The meal was over. At a sign from the Superior, Georges rose and read from the *Imitation*. They were at the end of the chapter on “The Admirable effects of the love of God”. The love of God was all that had been wanting to crown the evening.

*Love is circumspect, humble and righteous. It is neither cowardly, nor light, nor concerned with vanities, but sober, chaste, firm, tranquil, attentive in watching over the senses. He who is not ready to suffer all things in order to do the will of his Well-Beloved, does not know what it is to love . . .*



Georges waited until the refectory was empty before coming down from the dais, following Alexander with his eyes. On his way out Alexander could not turn round, for the Prefect of the junior division was supervising the movement from the hall, but he raised his right hand in a last greeting.

Georges sat down at a table and, in the vast, empty room, with the lights turned down, was served with the same dinner as the masters. Much he cared for a perquisite which the customary readers made such a fuss about! He was missing the face he had been contemplating. And the idea of being thus deprived of it, for the first time, in this room, made him feel his solitary state almost odious. He tried to picture the dormitory where Alexander, in the process of going to bed, was no doubt thinking of the words from the *Imitation*.

The servant had withdrawn, having asked Georges to switch out the lights when he had finished. Now Georges was entirely alone. The cherries served for his dessert were magnificent, much larger than those given to the boys, and there were two handfuls. He put them into Alexander's drawer.

The scent of lilacs filled the inner courtyard. Georges remembered what Father de Trennes had said, that it disturbed the boys in their sleep. It disturbed Georges, however, in the daytime, for it spoke to him of Alexander: often, indeed, when he was in study, he contemplated the bushes laden with flowers, through the open window, and imagined that their scent carried his friend's breath to him.

Father de Trennes was waiting on the threshold of the anteroom, by the dormitory door.

He stopped Georges and, pitching his voice low, said, “Well, I imagine you’re satisfied: secret assignation, public oglings..”

“What assignation?” Georges said, curtly.

His object was attack at once, to make it perfectly clear that he would tolerate no poaching on his preserves. But before saying so in so many words, he would try to make it clear by flat denials. The method was open to him for he had, in fact, never admitted anything. He would ignore the fact that, for eyes which knew what to look for, his attitude at the lectern had borne witness against him. He was certainly under no obligation to justify anything he might have said, or done, to such a man as Father de Trennes: he was in no wise accountable to him.

The Father, apparently, had not taken offence: he resumed, softly, “During the last break the junior school Supervisor of Studies came over to chat with me. I asked him to give me the figures of permissions to leave study, in his division, classified by reasons given. I said I wanted them for some comparative statistics—I am fond of statistics. It was child’s play to get him to tell me that permission to visit Father Lauzon had been granted to one, Alexander Motier. That visit coincided with your own absence: it proves what I suspected. You really should have realised, from the beginning, that you would be no match for me in subtlety. I will be your friend or your enemy: choose.

“In the course of your meeting today you and your friend must certainly have discussed an approach I made to him, through an intermediary, for your common good. I wished to persuade him to become my penitant; that should have reassured you—in default of *your* soul, I should have had his under my care. In spite of your distrust and his refusal, I

contrived an unexpected satisfaction for both of you: you were able to feast your eyes on each other throughout dinner this evening. I had thought, by this means, to inspire you, albeit belatedly, with feelings of friendship and gratitude towards me. Unfortunately, it seems that I was wrong, and the tone which you have chosen to adopt in speaking to me forces me to change my own: I am no longer making suggestions as to your actions; I am issuing orders.

“Tomorrow, during the midday break, you will go and fetch the younger Motier, whose Supervisor I shall have forewarned, and you will both come to my room. There you will make, to me, a kind of reciprocal confession—it will make up for the private confession which you avoided making. My forgiveness will be proportional to your sincerity.”

Georges had no hope of getting to sleep early that night, nor had he any wish to; nor, however, had he any inclination to tears, even to tears of rage. Coldly, he had made up his mind that this man must be destroyed, just as he had made up his mind to ruin André. But his new decision cost him no scruples. He was not, however, thinking of it in terms of a good action, that is, ridding the college of such a man, as he had rid it of such a boy. He was not concerned with the common welfare, but with his own. In André's case he had hesitated, for the boy had done him no harm; but there was no such hesitation in the case of Father de Trennes, who wished him ill. The priest had sometimes been kind and was still interesting, but still more was he false and treacherous. Their tacit treaty was broken.

Not later than tomorrow morning Georges planned to concert measures with Lucien. He, surely, would be delighted to avenge André at a master's expense. The undertaking would, obviously, be extremely risky: the Father had Georges' accomplices in his power, for in

accusing him they must accuse themselves. His prestige, his *savoir-faire*, and the Superior's trust all protected him. Ought he, Georges wondered, to recognise that the Father was too strong for him, and resign himself to do his bidding? The idea was as oppressive as a nightmare. He decided to sleep and, to that end, lay perfectly still on his back.

He heard the Supervisor enter the dormitory; as usual, his chaplet was brushing against his cassock. Did the man really pray, or only pretend to? Did he add up the indulgences he gained, as Lucien had formerly used to do? If he was a member of the Fraternity of the Rosary, every bead of his chaplet was worth twenty-five days. Or, like Carlo-Quinto, did he add up his victories? Victories over sin, or of sin? He might add up a great many things, since he was so fond of statistics—for example, the number of his quotations; or of his chosen boys; or of his nephews.

Georges became aware that the Father was making straight for him, possibly with a view to reopening the conversation. He pretended to be asleep. He was conscious of the Father stopping by his bed, then approaching his pillow. He felt scented breath on his face. He was violently agitated, but contrived to maintain the appearance of sleeping. Never in his life had he undergone this experience—going through a scene which touched him nearly while pretending to be asleep. What would come next—the electric torch, or the rose? He was only waiting for either to go through the motions of waking up; whereupon he would ask the Father, very seriously, to leave him alone.

However, the priest went away and then made two or three rounds of the dormitory. He stopped by another bed and stooped over its occupant, as he had just done to Georges. This time it was Maurice. Georges moved his head to the extreme end of the pillow, to get a

better view. The Father had sat down on the bedside table and was leaning forward. He was, no doubt, completing that review of all their faces which he had talked about. No, Maurice was sitting up, they must be talking. Not the least murmur of voices reached Georges' ears: it was not surprising that these nocturnal dialogues had disturbed nobody. Father de Trennes rose and returned to his room. A few seconds later Maurice got out of bed, arranged the bed-clothes carefully, and moved quietly away. Father de Trennes' door opened to receive him.

Quivering with excitement Georges stared at the dark oblong of the door, and the equally bare rectangle of the interior window, behind which the curtains must have been most carefully adjusted. This did not prevent him from seeing the room as clearly as if he had been inside it—the biscuits, the liqueur bottle, the prie-dieu, the bottles of toilet waters, the rubber bath—and Maurice.

In a flash it came to him that here was his chance to have done with the priest. Once again he was being offered a miracle, as in André's case; he did not know whom to thank for it, the saints or the gods.

Father de Trennes' fate was surely sealed. The mere fact of having one of the boys in his room at that hour of the night would damn him past recall. Georges had a moment of regret that it was Maurice, of all people, who must be sacrificed. But he could not help that, it was essential to act at once. Tomorrow the ultimatum he had received would expire; tonight he had his persecutor at his mercy. A great many things had had to happen in order to reverse their positions. Was such an opportunity likely to occur again? Today Georges was faced with the choice of vanquishing or being vanquished, of killing the devil or being killed by

him. This thought made him put aside that impulse of sympathy for Maurice. Besides, was it not this same Maurice who had been entrusted with keeping an eye on Alexander during the holidays? Father Lauzon, then, was about to be shown exactly what his trusty surveillant was worth; as the Superior would learn the worth of *his*. And was it not, again, this same Maurice who had tried to interest Alexander in this very Father de Trennes, and lead him to him? He would have to pay for his cynicism or his simplicity. He would be sacrificed to save the younger brother he had tried to corrupt. It was, in fact, all very edifying.

Georges thought of waking Lucien to discuss the matter with him. He was very sure that the Supervisor would not be eavesdropping behind that curtain. But he reflected that Lucien, considering his feelings about tale-bearing, might have an opinion contrary to his own, and would not be pleased if his opinion was overlooked. And Georges knew exactly what he proposed to do. This business concerned only Alexander and himself. He was no more obliged to keep Lucien informed of his behaviour towards Father de Trennes than, on Lucien's advice, he had been to keep Alexander up to date. Alone, he would answer blackmail with tale-bearing.

He got up, put on his slippers, slipped his jacket over his pyjamas, arranged his bed so as to conceal his absence, as the Father had taught him. Then, kneeling, he tore a page out of his small notebook and, resting on his box of toilet things, wrote, by the dim radiance of the night-light, *Go immediately to Father de Trennes' room—Allez done à l'instant chez le père de Trennes*. He counted on his fingers: it was an Alexandrine—an Alexandrine which was to save Alexander. The Superior would be delighted! He would appreciate that the whole point was in the *done*. He would come running as soon as he had scanned *that* line,

curious to discover what gloss upon the admirable sermon he had delivered on Sunday he was about to discover.

Georges remembered, then, that the edges of his notebook were gilt, a detail which might give him away if the Supervisor happened to see the page. He put it in his pocket and tore a page out of an exercise-book which he had in the drawer of his table. He wrote the message again and re-read it. His hand, which had been steady enough as he wrote, shook as he held the paper to the light. This was a fine piece of work he was embarked on—prettier even than in André's case. It was not mere tale-bearing. What he held in his hand was an anonymous letter. For a moment Georges was overcome with shame at the infamous nature of what he was about. Should he invoke, once again, the laws of chivalry? "No knighthood without prowess." But surely one such deed sufficed. But the thought of Alexander drove him to be ruthless even more imperatively than the thought of Lucien had done in October.

He folded the paper, and with that in one hand and his flash-lamp in the other, set off very cautiously. Outside Father de

Trennes' room he could smell cigarette smoke. Egyptian cigarettes, no doubt.

The corridor was all deep shadow. Georges switched on his torch. He felt like a burglar engaged in a crime. Comparing, as he usually did, present and past, he recalled his last nocturnal expedition, which was after Alexander's note to him had been seized. That night he had been ready to sacrifice himself for the boy who had been punished for his sake. On this occasion he was about to betray one of his masters and one of his schoolfellows; and for the same boy.

No light showed under the door to the Superior's rooms. This time he must have gone to

bed. Georges unfolded the note and pushed it under the door, written side upwards. Then he hammered on the door with his fist. M. le Supérieur was about to be well and truly woken up! There was no response. Did the Superior sleep like the dead in the shadow of the Eagle of Meaux's wings? Georges wondered, but with no particular anxiety; he would manage to make himself heard somehow. Nor was he worried that his note might be taken for a hoax. His only fear was lest its reader arrive on the scene too late. Dealing as he was with Father de Trennes, nothing short of catching him *in flagrante delicto* would serve. Maurice had already been with him for a good five minutes, and Georges estimated that another ten minutes was all he could count on. Furious at the idea of failure, he knocked more loudly than ever, and at last the familiar voice answered from within. He gave one more knock, to confirm that there really was someone there, then dashed out of the ante-room. He ran the length of the corridor, his finger-tips touching the wall to guide him, until he came to the dormitory door. He had reached it without switching on his torch. There he stopped, alarmed at the idea that the Father might be waiting for him. And the Superior could not be far behind! Was the traitor to be caught between two fires? Uniting, as it would, three gentlemen of noble blood, the subsequent scene should not be wanting in piquancy.

Georges took off his slippers and tip-toed, barefoot, past the Supervisor's room. Passing into the aisle between the beds, he crouched. Back at his bed, he hastily slipped out of his jacket, replaced it in its usual place so that no change should be visible, and got quickly between the sheets. His feelings were very different from those he had experienced when waiting for catastrophe to fall upon André. This time he no longer feared what must follow. His expedition had excited him, certainly; he had been greatly agitated when Father de

Trennes stooped over his bed and when he had watched Maurice leaving *his* bed; but now he was calm, impatient only for the curtain to rise on the tableau he had organised, and of which he would be the only spectator. It was as if he had produced a work of literature which, moreover, was to preserve his happiness and execute his vengeance.

Someone had entered the dormitory. There was a knocking on Father de Trennes' door. Georges raised himself in bed a little, staring towards the ante-room, still as dark as ever, but he could see a darker shape. And suddenly he experienced a wave of intense feeling; he realised what it was he had done. Now he could hear a brief exchange of words, but in voices pitched low, until the Superior's was raised to exclaim, "Open! I order you to open!" It was the Supervisor's turn to hear that word.

There was a sudden flood of light: Father de Trennes and the Superior were face to face. Georges, in the tumult of his feelings, could not hear what they were saying. Presently Maurice appeared, and made his way back to his bed, stifling his sobs. The door of Father de Trennes' room was still wide open. For a brief moment Father de Trennes' expression remained defiant. Then, although his visitor, who was looking straight into his eyes, had not uttered a word, he bowed his head slowly and went down on his knees. Then the door closed upon the two men.

Georges looked over the beds in the dormitory. Not a soul was stirring. Nobody had witnessed the scene but himself. Nobody, therefore, would know that Father de Trennes had, for all his pride, learning, irony and perfidy, been driven to humble himself before the Superior, no longer his friend, but his judge and the representative of his Order. The dormitory's sleep had not been disturbed by this catastrophe, any more than by Maurice's

tears. The only waking spirits there were the two witnesses of Father de Trennes' last visit in that room.

In the midst of the silence yet so near to the storm-centre, Georges experienced all the cosiness of his own bed. Little by little remorse yielded place to the pleasure of having gained his end. True, he was sorry for Maurice, whose distress reminded him of Lucien's on the night of André's chastisement. He was even sorry for Father de Trennes, who would be suffering, soon, a thousand slights inflicted by those of his cloth. But after all had not both got their deserts? All they had to do now was undergo a conversion, as Lucien had done. Georges had set their feet back in the straight and narrow path. Indeed, what a successful missionary he was! His friendships resulted in mass conversions! So many people would be working for his salvation that he would no longer have to pay any attention to it himself.

Meanwhile he had got himself out of his difficulties here below. He was free. He was once more master of his fate. The Superior was engaged in restoring order and authority, but it was Georges' secret triumph. Once again, and at the expense of the man who had taught him the phrase, he triumphed in secret. He had raised the Superior, cast down the Supervisor—he, a boy of fourteen and a half whose Latin prep had been returned to him that day bearing the master's note, "You could have done better." Well, this night's work was not bad, not bad at all. The scene his intervention had provoked was, perhaps, more suggestive for a painter than for a writer. It was worthy to be proposed as the subject for competition not at the *Académie des Palinods* but at the *Beaux-Arts*. Something in the style of the larger pictures one saw in the galleries. "Theodosius calling upon St Ambrose in the portico of Milan Cathedral." Or "Louis le Debonnaire doing penance before the Bishops at Attigny".

Or “The Emperor Henry IV at the feet of Gregory VII at Canossa”. All of which might be otherwise expressed as “one barber shaving another”.

The chances were that at that moment the two heroes of the hour, one of whom at least was well shaved, were on their knees side by side, seeing which could out-pray the other. But their thoughts, like those of their pupils when *they* were praying, were certainly elsewhere. To begin with, had Father de Trennes realised how it came about that the Superior was there at all? The

Superior had not explained to André about the discovery of his poem: would he explain to the Father what brought him to that room? Would Father de Trennes believe himself to be the victim of chance, of a colleague, or of a boy? And if he suspected Georges, would he forgive him the blow he had received as readily as the Sienese nobleman had forgiven St Bernardin? He must know that he had driven Georges too far. He had abused the privileges conferred on him by his knowledge of antiquity and the lives of the saints. His appeals for purity were becoming altogether too feverish, his quotations entirely too pressing; and moreover there was one quotation he had forgotten, although it was from Musset:

*Those whom you choose are called to be too pure!*

[Vous les voulez trop purs, les élus que vous faites!]

The Superior, for his part, must surely be considerably intrigued by the manner in which

he had been alerted. Naturally, he would realise that somebody in the senior dormitory had been responsible. On a former occasion he had punished Georges, albeit nominally, for having left the dormitory without permission. But he would have reason to think that, on this occasion, no other course had been possible: clearly excellent things might be done without permission. At all events, he would no doubt see in what had happened a proof of virtue in his charges which could not fail to reassure him, even were he to be as ruthless with Maurice as he had been with André.

Whatever the issue was to be, Georges could not work up any alarm over it. If Maurice were expelled, then certainly Alexander would go too, and, next year, would enter some other college whither Georges, as he had promised, would follow him. And why not Lucien as well? And there Georges would busy himself in making up to Maurice for any wrongs he might have done him, just as he had done in Lucien's case. Maurice would lose nothing by the change. They would find him a friend, somebody really nice. André would transfer to the same college. Being six, they would not be afraid of being accused of special friendships. It would round things off nicely if their association were to be known as the *Collegium Tarsicii*.

Besides, might not Georges, Alexander, Lucien and others be obliged to leave St Claude's under a cloud? The Supervisor had only, whether scrupulously or vindictively, to expose the skeleton in the school cupboard. In that case proscription would be almost general. But that very fact made it impossible. The Superior would be the very first flatly to refuse to believe that St Claude's was such a den of abominations.

Nor need those accused play a passive part and tamely submit. They had matter for

adequate *tu quoques* to Father de Trennes' slanders. Georges remembered Alexander's threat to write to the Pope when his confessor had proposed denying him holy communion. In this case they would threaten to write to the Government. They had it in their power to provoke an all-round bust-up.

Meanwhile, Father de Trennes would be moving out. Where would he go? Not to another college, like his collegians. He would still, no doubt, have access to his nephews: he might retire and cultivate his nepotism. Or, if really converted, he would withdraw to a monastery. There he would have leisure to meditate upon the classic text "On the small number of the elect", and profit by it. Unless he confined himself to transferring to another Order, supposing that to be feasible. On that point Georges was insufficiently informed: he recalled, only, that there were 150 Orders for men, or thereabouts. In the event of such transfer being possible, Father de Trennes would, clearly, be faced only by an embarrassment of riches. Most likely, however, he would console himself by turning to archaeology. He would return to the Near East, would see Greece again. Its ancient temples would be his sanctuary, albeit the Templars' maxims had not served to safeguard him.

"*Bon voyage, Father!*" Georges thought, "Forgive me for having driven you from the city ramparts. Perhaps we may meet again one day, in the fatherland of Theognis. And you, M. le Supérieur, now praying in that room where Lucien and I were made to pray, forgive me for having forced you to obey, to the letter, the order 'Watch and pray'. And perhaps, in the future, it might serve your interest better to pray a little less and watch a little more."

Hallo! Maurice was sobbing again! Come, come, my dear fellow! Can it be that you, who are a man among women, are but a boy among men?

Georges turned on his side and pulled the sheets up over his ears, to shut out the sound of Maurice's weeping.

In the morning, at reveille, everyone stared to see the Prefect of Studies in the Supervisor's place. Most of the boys must be thinking that Father de Trennes had been taken ill. Morning had restored Maurice, who appeared perfectly easy, carrying his secrets in a manner as carefree as Georges' own. Either he was resigned to his fate or, having thought it over, had come to the conclusion that he would be let off.

They went down for Meditation. The Superior's face was haggard with fatigue. Evidently he had not slept that night. He had not shaved. Georges thought of Father de Trennes' phrase about "the face of a self-respecting man". And could he have failed to recall, also, that meeting one evening in October when André's expulsion had been officially announced? He was wondering what this fine spring morning had in store, but was tolerably easy as to the principal business; he knew that his fate was bound up with his friends'.

In a dull voice the Superior read a text concerning the painful mysteries of the rosary, the fruits of which were, notably, repentance, mortification and the salvation of souls. This reading had all the air of a particular allusion, for those in a position to understand. It was like the Retreat preacher's sermon on the occasion when intellectual licence had been condemned, with André in mind. Nevertheless, Georges was surprised when the Superior made no other reference to current events: surely the disappearance of his most highly valued Supervisor of Studies called for some explanation. Was the Superior embarrassed by the fact that a pupil, whose face was even then before him, had been caught by him in the

said Supervisor's room because another pupil, who was and would remain unknown to him, had denounced this outrage? And it was, indeed, an outrage which he might well hesitate to denounce in public: the case was rather more delicate than André's. He had cause to blush for his Order and for his house. Still, he might have recalled the proverb that "one bad monk doesn't ruin the abbey"[*Pour un moine, l'abbaye ne faut pas.*] .

When the bell sounded, the Superior closed his book and looked up at his audience. For all his confidence, Georges trembled a little: the moment had come. Slowly, and in a tone of gravity beyond anything the boys had ever heard from him, the Superior uttered the following words: "I shall ask you to dedicate this morning's prayers and communions to M. de Trennes, who has left us."

That was all: it seemed that Father de Trennes' funeral oration was to be shorter than Nicholas Cornet's. All: but it was enough. The shock ran through the whole senior division. Almost everyone present had some reason to feel it: the youngest because Father de Trennes had taken an interest in them, the rest because they took an interest in him. Many looked suddenly thoughtful; they were probably wondering if this event might not have serious consequences for themselves. As Lucien had foreseen, the news had a lively reception. Had Father de Trennes done so much damage in so few weeks? The school year was ending on an even more exciting note than at the beginning. On the way to chapel André's name was in numerous mouths—those whose owners were trying to reassure themselves: no black sheep had been pointed out among their number. And no doubt they were right. There was no call for undue alarm. This time the hullabaloo was not among the boys: the Fathers were washing each other's heads.

During the service Lucien asked Georges for his personal opinion.

“I think Maurice got caught. He’s looking very odd, if you ask me.”

Lucien turned and glanced at Alexander’s brother.

“He’s absorbed in his book. So’s everyone. Father de Trennes will be pleased: he began by asking for your prayers and mine, and now here’s the whole senior school praying for him, or at least pretending to.”

Georges could have told him that Father de Trennes had already, during the night, been prayed for by the Superior; and he might have reminded him that André, too, had been commended to senior school’s prayers. Lucien had prayed, during three months, for Georges; and, for what it was worth, Georges had prayed for Lucien. At least it could be said that, at St Claude’s, as in Fersen’s poetry, their hearts, if not their souls, were in prayer.

Maurice’s fervour, in going to the holy table, was marked. It was like Lucien’s of old, the Lucien who had been in a state of grace both illuminative and purgative. Not a single senior failed to communicate; the communion was unanimous—a unanimity for which the Superior, if not Father de Trennes, was responsible.

At breakfast, by an extraordinary exception, *Deo Gratias* was not given. So much the better; it would be the sooner done, and the subsequent break would be all the longer. And Georges had received a smile from Alexander; he, all-ignorant of those tremendous events whose cause he was, had just found Georges’ dinner cherries under his serviette.

Out on the playground their old Supervisor, restored to his post, was at once surrounded. He was being asked why the Superior had said “M. de Trennes” instead of “Father de Trennes”, and whether this meant that the Father was giving up holy orders in order to

dedicate himself to his scientific work. But the Supervisor replied, "Once a priest always a priest"—*Tu es sacerdos in aeternam*. They pretended to believe that the term used by the Superior had been a lapse. And there must be some perfectly simple reason for the Father's departure: some decided that a member of his family had been taken ill; others, that he had come into a fortune. The Supervisor got rid of these people by obliging them to start a game—they must get back into the habit of games, but the freedom from that obligation granted by Father de Trennes was being claimed, at least for that day.

There was one large group of boys, with representatives of all the senior forms, gossiping in a corner. Georges and Lucien, seeing that Maurice was there, went over to it. Here, the boys were not concerned with ragging their old Supervisor, but with trying to discover the truth about their recent one. The truth? That, perhaps, was saying too much: the several speakers seemed chiefly concerned to conceal it from each other, resorting, to that end, to equivocation, favourite device of him they were discussing. Maurice suggested that the Father had got involved with a woman in the neighbourhood. But was that possible? The near-by village offered nothing but goose-girls, and the market town, little better provided, was in any case distant an hour's bicycle ride. A youthful gallant in the fourth form put forward, as a more tenable hypothesis, an affair with several of his form-mates, to whom Father de Trennes had shown certain kindnesses. Names were called for, but the theorist refused to give them. Lucien reminded them that, had the theory been the true one, the wretches in question would no longer be among them. Somebody else returned to the charge: he had always had his suspicions: one night in the dormitory, when he had woken up, he had seen Father de Trennes looking at some of the sleepers with an electric torch. But Georges

cut short all comment on this by saying Father de Trennes had told him that it was his practice to recite a chaplet for those who were sleeping badly.

One of the oldest boys declared that none of these tales had any common sense. He considered that Father de Trennes was as indifferent to goose-girls as he was to junior schoolboys and chaplets. The Father was, he insisted, a scientist, a broadminded sceptic; moreover he was popular, and had won the friendship of the senior boys. No more was required to arouse jealousy among the masters, and there had been a conspiracy among them to be rid of him. Their trade-mark was all over the business.

A member of the Philosophy form, while approving this hypothesis in principle, was of opinion that they must look higher for the source of the trouble. Father de Trennes was suffering under the wrath not of their schoolmasters—for there had been no question of his remaining permanently at St Claude's—but of other members of his Order whom, no doubt, he put in the shade. He had been summoned to give an account of himself—God knew what for! He might, perhaps, be in trouble for restoring pagan temples. And the philosopher putting forward this notion reminded them of the mottoes of the several religious Orders: *Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, *Ut in omnibus glorificetur Deus*, etc. All these persecutions of priests by priests were always carried out in God's name. Formerly the Father would have been put into an *in pace*, and kept on bread and water. It was at least fortunate that the Inquisition no longer existed. Voltaire and the *Rights of Man* were doing fine service, even to the clergy themselves.

During ten o'clock study the Prefect came to fetch Maurice, and Lucien nudged Georges by way of congratulating him on having been right. Judging by the looks exchanged, the

impression made was the same all over the room. The theories put forward during break were giving way to realities. The danger had quickly been forgotten, but it existed. It was the boys' turn to face the ordeal: the decimation of their ranks was about to begin. Would Maurice be spirited away as André had been? And didn't Lucien seem a shade anxious? Georges, bent over his Greek prep, was visited by a vision of Father de Trennes; that priest, himself so fond of Greek, had, before his departure, settled Georges' fate for him. At last the door opened again and everyone looked up: it was Maurice, returning. He was swaggering a little. After a while, when nobody else had been called out, the whole study seemed relieved of an oppression. They could breathe again.

His prep finished, Georges borrowed a short treatise on ecclesiastical law from the study book-case. His mind set at rest as regards himself, he was beginning to feel concern for what, by reason of his cloth, the Father might have to undergo. The idea of an *in pace* had made an impression on him. He discovered that Father de Trennes' "misdemeanour" was not among the "reserved cases" and consequently was not subject to "medicinal punishments, otherwise called censures", to wit, excommunication, interdict and suspension. As for the "vindictive punishments or 'satisfactory' punishments", Father de Trennes was apparently subject to them only in a "temporary" form, and not the "perpetual" form. There remained "disciplinary sanctions"—to wit special fasts, alms, penitential works, and spiritual exercises in a religious establishment. But then, always and wherever he found himself, Father de Trennes' exercises would surely be spiritual.

After the midday meal, and just as break was starting, Georges was informed by the Supervisor that the Superior wished to speak to him. More discretion was being shown in

his case than in Maurice's, but that might be a bad rather than a good sign.

"This is it," he said to Lucien, adding, "*Ave, moriturus te salutat.*"

The Superior had shown admirable perspicacity in going straight to the boy who was at once Father de Trennes' accomplice and his betrayer. Even before luncheon, when the Prefect of Studies had informed Georges that he would not be required as reader, Georges had had a presentiment of trouble. He was being demoted uncommonly swiftly. The honour which had been done him was, certainly, hardly his due, but he had carried it well; they might have let him read the life of just one more saint. Now, he knew the reasons which had caused his name to be struck for ever from the list of readers, and written into a very different list.

However, he did not care. His fighting mood of the night before had passed. He considered that any defence would be pointless, moreover he was sick of defending himself. He would make no answer whatsoever; and he would listen without flinching to the announcement of his expulsion, after, at least, having made sure that Alexander, also, was to be removed. At the same time, before leaving the Superior's study, he would hand him the original of the mysterious message which had been slipped under his door; he would leave a badly embarrassed man behind him.

Georges entered the Superior's quarters as calmly as if they had been the Hotel de Rambouillet. The Superior was sitting with his back to the light near an open window, through which came the scent of lilacs. He could certainly not have known that this circumstance reminded Georges of something said by Father de Trennes, and conjured up an image of the younger Motier—that it put Georges in mind of the two people concerning

whom he had been summoned to that room. The Superior pointed to a chair.

“I have noticed,” he said, “that your positions for composition are not as good as they were since Easter.” He made a long arm to take up a paper on his desk and went on, consulting it, “You were fourth in English, whereas you were second last term, and had, before that, been first. You are third in Latin, having twice been first. In Greek grammar you have been second on one occasion, third on another. On Sunday you will learn that your latest position is less satisfactory. In short, excepting in the case of Greek literature, you have fallen off in all your weekly compositions until now, this term. What is the reason for this, my boy?”

Georges answered, with a smile, that it must be bad luck, for he was sure that he was trying just as hard this term as he had done last term, spurred on, moreover, by the prospect of the annual prize-giving. And on that territory where he had, in spite of his efforts, lost ground, he was counting on the final composition—the “secret composition”, the results of which were not announced publicly, to regain it.

“I was afraid,” the Superior said, “that you might have been disturbed, distracted from your work in some way.”

“Had that been the case,” Georges said, “I should also have gone down in Greek literature.”

When he had made up his mind not to answer accusations, he had been envisaging himself as overwhelmed and cast down; but events were evidently taking a more favourable turn, and one which could not fail to entertain him.

“It is true,” the Superior resumed, “that I am aware of your assiduity in regard to the

sacraments, and of your piety. I was even informed that you had a special devotion to St Bernardin of Siena, upon which I must congratulate you.”

Georges assumed a modest air, as on the day when he had been congratulated upon his interest in St Tarsicius. Beneath its cover, however, he was proud of having guessed correctly at the artifice by means of which his selection to read in the refectory, last night, had been contrived. The Superior leaned towards him and took his hand.

“My boy, I want you to look me in the eyes. You are sitting in full daylight and I can read your soul through your eyes.”

A short pause; then, slowly, “You have been under the influence of M. de Trennes.”

Georges pretended astonishment.

“I have? Not in the least, M. le Supérieur!”

“Who was it intervened in your favour in the matter of reading in the refectory?”

“Father de Trennes liked to do things which gave people pleasure, without being asked.”

“Your answer touches me, because of the feeling which bound me to M. de Trennes. But my righteous curiosity must probe deeper. Interests of the utmost gravity are involved, so that I am obliged to speak plainly. At least, in this as in the other matter, in which you approached me, I am, in a certain sense, glad to have to do with a lad of mettle, of honour, and with a sense of duty such as yourself. Circumstances have selected you to enlighten me, if not to reassure me. I shall confine my investigation to questioning you and only you. I have no doubt that you will realise the bearing of my interrogation, and likewise the importance of maintaining, as regards any third party, a religious silence concerning all this. I should add that anything you may tell me will not be communicated to the person principally involved,

and will have no consequences whatsoever for any person now under our roof here. But do not forget that, in your replies, you will be taking responsibility—quite apart from your religious responsibility—not only as regards myself, but for such boys as M. de Trennes, in his capacity as a priest, may have to do with. Remember the Divine words, ‘Woe betide him who leads a child astray!’

“M. de Trennes has the gift of inspiring trust and, according to what he told me, many of the boys here went to him for guidance. But the important thing I am anxious to be assured of is that there has not, under cover of this, been any—imprudence one would have to deplore. To that end, I shall ask you two questions. First, have you ever been to M. de Trennes’ room at night? Secondly, have you noticed anyone else doing so? I am asking neither for details nor names, only a ‘Yes’ or a ‘No’: that will be quite enough.”

Once again Georges pretended astonishment—as soon as the first question was out. Then, upon hearing the second, he assumed a thoughtful air. He was moved at thus finding himself the judge of the man he had betrayed. The man had tried to force him into admissions reflecting on himself; now he was being required to admit things reflecting on his tormentor. It would not do: Georges had saved himself from Father de Trennes’ traps: he could afford, now, to save Father de Trennes from punishment. He would give him back his future, intact, the future Georges thought he had ruined. He would leave him free to remain his own man, to be what he was, as André had remained free to be himself, and, indeed, everyone else involved.

He was not much moved by the reference to his “responsibility”. It was to Father de Trennes that he owed reparation: he must repair, by a lie, the harm he had done him by

exposing his lies. As for those hypothetical boys whose innocence must be preserved, they must take care of themselves. The Superior, if Father de Trennes had been right, had only to read St Augustine. The Bishop of Hippo would teach him more, in this instance, than the Bishop of Meaux, so that the Superior might become inclined to add to the curse upon men who lead boys astray— “But how many little ones there are who lead men astray!”

Meanwhile, he seemed to be at least half-satisfied by Georges’ attitude, since he now merely repeated his second question.

“Well. Had you noticed anything?”

Georges looked him straight in the face and replied calmly, “No. I have never seen anyone go into Father de Trennes’ room, any more than I ever went there myself. Moreover, I feel sure that, had anyone gone there, I must have heard about it.”

As he left the Superior’s quarters Georges tore up his original note, the one on gilt-edged paper, and slipped the pieces under the base of St Tarsicius’ statuette, thus doing, with that notable document, what he had not had time to do with André’s poem. St Tarsicius had not protected Lucien’s friend, but he had protected Lucien and was protecting Maurice. He would surely protect Father de Trennes. At all events, Georges was glad to have succeeded in deceiving the Superior again, thus avenging himself on the man who had been the instrument of his other revenges. He bore the Superior a grudge for being the representative of absurd rules and a blind authority. And what a singular man he was, this Superior, whose oratorical preambles were as carefully wrapped-up as Father de Trennes’! His mealy-mouthed talk about Georges’ work and his allusions to Georges’ piety were very worthy of the pious spitefulness he had let fall at the time of the trouble over Alexander. He had only

himself to blame if, claiming that he must be told the truth, he called forth falsehood, very much as the rustic clergy, applauding every pious word in *Polyeucte*, provoked a counter-demonstration.

Father de Trennes had evidently defended himself quite ably; he had persuaded the Superior that the visit he had received that night was an exception. André, too, had been an exception: everyone was an exception, since everyone was, and remained, *what* he was. Had not Georges himself been to the Superior exactly what he had been to Father de Trennes? Both had, in their own word, *elected* him; he had ratified neither election, neither that inspired by his face, nor that inspired by his soul. The Superior's choice seemed to him even less flattering than the other; in fact, it exasperated him. Had the man imagined that he, Georges de Sarre, was a common informer? He might as well have imagined that it was he who had been the bearer of that anonymous nocturnal message. What did they take him for?

Study having started, he scribbled a resume of his interview, embellished with several of the Superior's finer periods, and slipped it to his neighbour. Afterwards, the two friends shared a triumphal tea, while Lucien contributed a sufficiently odd account of his own.

"While you were telling lies to the Superior," he told Georges, "Maurice was telling us—guess what! His adventure with Father de Trennes. Some of the chaps had been ragging him about being sent for this morning, asking him if he still thought the Father had been sacked for being involved with a woman. He was all right at lunch, since we didn't have *Deo Gratias*. After that he still wouldn't talk, then suddenly made up his mind to tell us, and had us in fits of laughter.

"It seems he was sleeping the sleep of the just, when Father de Trennes appears and

wakes him up—we know that bit—starts talking about the eternal life, and invites him to have a drink in his room. Maurice says, of course, that it was the first time it had happened. As soon as they were together, the Father began sermonising about St Venant, martyred at fifteen—yesterday’s saint, as you know—in short, a new edition of St Pancras, martyr at fourteen, St Nicholas of Tolentino, and the rest. If the Father had stayed here a bit longer, everyone in the dormitory would have had a party and a boy-saint.

“Anyway, there they were, swigging away and smoking like chimneys, when all of a sudden—bang! bang! at the door. The Father says to Maurice—‘Don’t move, it’s probably one of your schoolfellows who’s ill, or I’m wanted for a service.’ He thought that one out and then says, ‘Wait, though—there are no nocturnal services just now.’ Next comes the Superior’s voice, murmuring, if you please, ‘I’ve been sent for to come to you.’ The joke seems fine to me, but it appears Father de Trennes didn’t relish it. He shoved Maurice onto the prie-dieu and reached for his surplice, but the Superior was getting impatient—in fact if the Father hadn’t opened the door the Superior would have broken it down! Maurice says it was priceless, but actually I don’t fancy he was finding it so, listening to the conversation—all about him—which followed:

“‘What is this boy doing in your room?’

“‘He asked me to hear his confession.’

“‘At this time of night? It’s against canon law.’

“It seems the Father had been breaking canon law all right, but with the excuse that he had taken pity on a criminal whose bad conscience was keeping him awake.

“Alas and alack! The next thing is, the Superior, whom Maurice is watching out of the

corner of his eye, catches sight of the bottle, the half-empty glasses, and the cigarettes burning away on the ash-tray. His face changes and he looks at the two culprits with a glance like the Eagle of Meaux catching the Swan of Cambrai and Mme Guyon in the act—practically a mythological scene, come to think of it! To Maurice he said curtly:

“‘You don’t confess in pyjamas. Back to your bed. I’ll send for you in the morning.’

“Maurice left them to it—the Father looking less like Mme Guyon than like Merope about to declaim, *Barbarian, he is my son!*

“Our midnight penitent was questioned by the Superior again, today, but not, it seems, with much conviction. There was no consulting of reference books in search of M. de Fersen. It seems likely that Father Lauzon had taken a hand, you know his devotion to the Motier family. Moreover, Maurice was able to take refuge in the holy sacraments by referring to his daily communions, as we did with Father de Trennes. Maurice says that when he did that, the Superior clasped his head in his hands, as if wondering what on earth was coming next. You can’t wonder the poor devil was in a state! We use his own weapons to defend ourselves against him, and there are some not above disguising their real selves with props out of his own wardrobe. In his eyes, you were under the wing of St Bemardin of Siena—for that’s how you had just been presented to him. In short, as regards Maurice, our man must have decided that there was no arguing with those daily communions on the other side, and dismissed him with the advice to take communion more often than ever, and, of course, to keep his mouth shut—the same instructions as yours, in fact. Universal mum’s the word in the matter of Father de Trennes. Maurice had already told Alexander to be as discreet as the tomb. So that, whatever else one can say, like you he helped to save Father de

Trennes and made a fool of the Superior.

“One thing only is still obscure: how was the Superior got out of his bed in the first place? There’s always a mystery in affairs of this kind. We never found out how André’s poem turned up in the Superior’s hands. If this sort of thing goes on I shall start believing in guardian angels.”

In the light-mindedness with which the others received these events Georges found a balm for the remorse which still troubled him. Yet it pained him to see high tragedy reduced to farce. Even Maurice had changed his role! However, for their masters, the whole business had ended, like *Polyeucte*, in making “the name of God” ring out.

It was once again possible to talk in the dormitory. Lucien leaned over towards Georges’ bed.

“I’ll tell you a secret: Father de Trennes has not been converted. He didn’t even have a brief glimpse of the Light like I did at ten-thirty on the night of October 6th.”

“How d’you know?”

“If he’d renounced the devil, he’d also have renounced our pyjamas and would have left them under our pillows before leaving.”

“Perhaps he didn’t have the time. He’ll leave them as an offering at the feet of the Olympian Hermes.”

“Well, but he didn’t tell the Superior the truth.”

“Yes, but that was because of Maurice and the rest of us.” “There’ll be some here sorry to miss their drink and biscuits.” “What I’m sorry for is not having seized the chance to ask

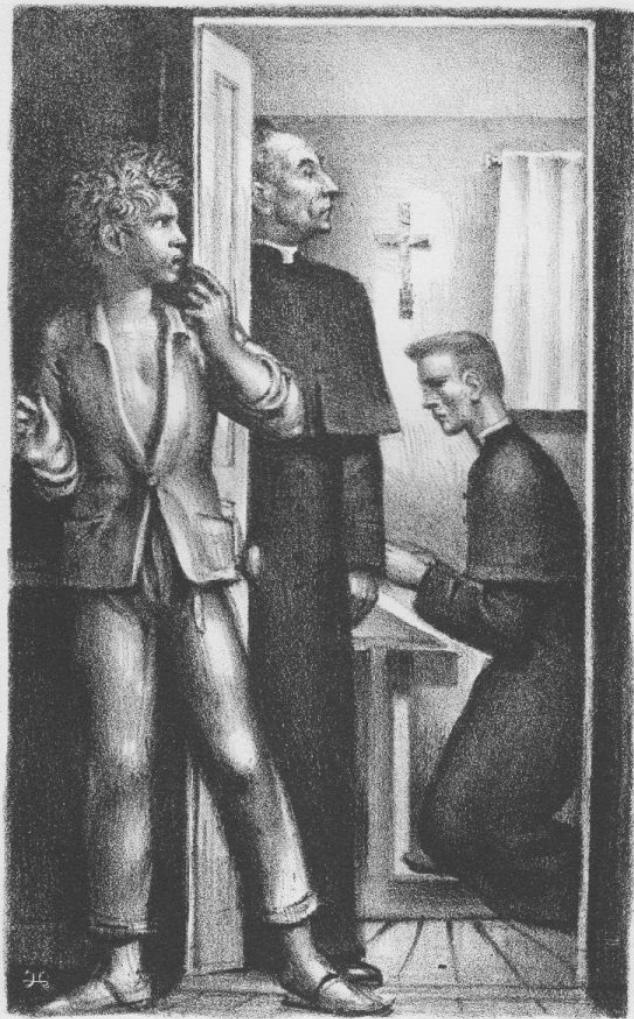
the chap more questions about antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times. His information was singularly interesting. It was something to be woken up in the middle of the night to hear someone deliver a talk, incongruously, about beauty . . .”

“ . . . and, impurely, about purity.”

That Monday morning, after mass, they had the first Rogation procession. Two by two, the juniors went first, followed by the seniors. Alexander and Georges, recalling the opportunity lost on Palm Sunday, had made better arrangements this time—Alexander still last of his procession, and Georges first of the seniors, immediately behind him.

Never, since the incident in March, had they been so close together in a religious ceremony. Nor had they ever been together in the open air so early in the morning.

The country-side was radiant in brilliant sunshine. The hedgerow flowers had not yet lost their dew. Georges, hitherto, had known nothing of Rogations excepting through *Le Génie du Christianisme*, and it was, indeed, the Christian genius that he willingly honoured for this romantic procession. He opened his missal, wishing to follow the saints' litanies, and discovered that neither St Georges, nor St Alexander, nor St Lucien figured in the list. The litanies of the Holy Name of Jesus might, it is true, have reminded him of his Easter notions concerning the Beautiful Name of Alexander. Moreover, he discovered that he was engaged in acquiring thirty years and thirty forties of indulgences.



Then he read the historic note on Rogations: it seemed that, in ancient Rome at the same season of the year, there were processions in honour of the rustic deities. In a flash these words changed his own train of thought, and he realised why he had been so susceptible to the charm of this Christian ceremony. His pagan soul owed nothing, after all, to Chateaubriand. He shut his missal, as he would have shut *Le Génie du Christianisme* had he been reading it, and gave free rein to his imagination. For his part in it, this had become a Roman procession. The hymns he was hearing belonged to the ancient religion. The saints they were invoking were the gods he adored. The birds flying over their heads were birds of omen. The oak boughs which had been set about the crossroad crucifixes were, once again, dedicated to Jupiter. When, at each station, the violet-coped priest halted to asperse the four cardinal points with holy water, what Georges saw was the Arval Priest calling upon Ceres to ensure the coming harvest.

Alexander, marching just in front of him, added a touch of reality to that dream. He wore the gold chain of a young patrician about his neck, and as for his beige shorts and jacket, they were, if anything, more becoming than the ancient costume.

At the final benediction the point on the road where the two friends had halted was a sharp curve hidden by a wall. They were side by side, kneeling on their mass-books, as if the latter were a symbol to be spurned. Georges let the hand on the same side as his friend, hang down; and his hand, hidden by the long grass, gave him the pleasure of touching Alexander's leg.

The second procession saw them still in the same places. This time they marched off in another direction.

Georges had decided that this time the procession was taking place in Greece, but Greece in her hey-day, and Greece, above all, without Father de Trennes! His daydreams had already produced, for his delight, an Alexander in pyjamas, an Alexander as a young nobleman at the Hotel de Rambouillet, an Alexander as Pope in the school chapel, and an Alexander as a young Roman patrician. Now he dwelt upon the notion of an ancient Athenian public ritual ceremony of the kind in which boys took part, boys like themselves, boys like Alexander, if even antiquity had produced such. He had seen photographs of the Parthenon frieze, and observed the marching ephebi, for the most part draped in the chlamys, but some unclad. They put off the chlamys, too, in the Gymnopaediae in honour of Apollo and Hyacinthus. It was not the sun of the Eucharist which Georges saw rise over the countryside: it was Apollo coming to awaken Hyacinthus, and cover him with a radiance better than any chlamys. The boy who had, formerly, turned into a flower, had become a boy again, yet still redolent of flower-scent—the scent of lavender, sweeter and more subtle than the scent of hyacinths at sunrise.

For the third and last expedition in the limpid light of morning, Georges and Alexander were separated. Supervision was close and it had not been possible to change their places in the procession. This time it was not history from which Georges drew his vision of Olympus, but from *La Belle Hélène*. He had seen the operetta performed in a casino theatre

and recalled one or two choruses, as gay as the one suggested by St Pancras.

*Oïa Képhalé! Képhalé! Oh, la! la!*

*Oïa Képhalé! Képhalé! Oïa!*

He sang these words to himself for a few moments, but the accompaniment of the litany and the slow movement of the procession transformed their rhythm into a funeral march. In any case he was suddenly as bored with *La Belle Hélène* as with *Ambarvalia* and *Gymnopaediae*. It seemed to him that nothing could be better than to belong to his own age and his own country. He gave himself up to the mildness of the air and the sweet scents of earth. He would have liked to take Alexander's hand in his own, and to run with him across woods and fields.

That afternoon the barber held court, for the first time since the Easter holidays. Georges, waiting his turn, wondered why the man never said a word, and whether perhaps he was not a mute, deliberately chosen as such, like prison barbers in times past. True, the school barber had no reason either to ask or to answer questions: there was no question of frictions, or lotions or shampoo. His only instruments were scissors, comb, and clippers. His customers confined themselves, as each took his turn in the chair, to a curt indication of the type of cut required, whereupon, in silence, the man set to work. Was he simply surly because the Bursar paid him too little, or because he liked neither boys nor priests? He might be holding his tongue only because there was a Father always present—to make sure he did no errands for the boys; he might post letters for them, or bring in cigarettes. Or

possibly the priest was there to see that the barber did not, to quote the rules, “speak against faith and morals”. Evidently less reliance was placed in the barber than in the music mistress; she, like him, came from the outside world, but practised her craft without a witness. True, she had, by a wide margin, passed the canonical age and was, moreover, a member of the Third Order of St Francis.

“Leave it quite long,” Georges said, when his turn came. He was not a little proud of the handsome head of hair which nature had given him. The slight chatter of the clippers accompanied the sound of the Supervisor’s footsteps as he paced the room, and the faint clinking of his holy medals. Thus, too, had Father de Trennes’ chaplet sounded as he walked the dormitory. Did the Father who watched over the barber’s labours possess the medal of Notre-Dame-des-Ermites, which had been the principal ornament of Lucien’s collection? Some people there were who wore such medals all their lives, others only for a few months. As for the chaplet, he had read that, in the East, it serves only to cool and occupy the fingers.

Georges’ eyes dropped to the cloth in which he was draped. His single golden lock, cut clean off, had just fallen to the scissors. The loss went to his heart. St Claude’s barber had destroyed the work of the holiday barber. With what motive and by what right had the fellow sacrificed those few fair hairs? Had it been malice or negligence, had he been punishing fraud or correcting accident? In any case, but for the Supervisor’s presence, Georges would certainly have abused the wretched hairdresser. As it was, he had clasped the lock in his hand as if it had been the other, Alexander’s; and, as he did so, he thought again of Father de Trennes, whom he had driven from the college in defence of his secret, the secret of his golden lock of hair.

In the conservatory: the boy at once noticed the little white gap, like a scar, which the barber had made. Georges had considered bleaching another lock, but he had been afraid it might give him away, and was not anxious to make himself a laughingstock.

“An offering I owed you,” he said to Alexander, and handed him the lock of hair. The boy looked at the fair hair, among which were others, Georges’ natural auburn.

“You and me,” he said.

Then he asked Georges what had brought about Father de Trennes’ departure. The event had restored the former junior school Supervisor of Studies to his old place, as it had the senior’s old Supervisor, but Alexander had as yet had no reason to complain of that, since he had obtained permission to leave the room during study without any difficulty. Georges told him that, as was supposed, Father de Trennes had been obliged to pack his traps and leave, after a row with the Superior.

“I’m easier in my mind for your sake,” Alexander said, “I wasn’t worried for my own.”

Georges laughed.

“You should be easier in your mind for your brother’s sake. There was a good deal to worry about on his account.”

They were seated side by side: Alexander rested his head on Georges’ shoulder.

“Was it to my brother that I wrote, ‘I think of you all the time’?”

The calendar indicated the approach of first communion Retreat. This, of course, affected only certain boys in the junior school, whose preacher for the occasion was their

own Prefect. But Georges thought of Alexander, who was nearer to the event. Would Alexander be dwelling fondly on the memory of his own first communion? It was often said, at St Claude's, that the day of one's first communion was the most wonderful day of one's life: and it had been Father de Trennes' opinion that first communion on St Pancras' day was the finest of all.

While the younger juniors were being prepared to receive that sacrament, rehearsals of *Les Plaideurs* were going forward in senior school. The Superior did not take Bossuet's side in the seventeenth-century quarrel concerning the theatre, since he considered comedy and piety to be reconcilable. And why not, since he could swallow even more striking contradictions: the public reading of *Tar tar in de Tarascon* on one day, and *The Lives of the Saints* on another, for example; and dismissing Father de Trennes while keeping Maurice.

At the Academy session on the last Sunday in May he had commemorated the birthday of a distinguished old boy of the school, the one who had become a member of the *Académie des Sciences*, in the zoology section. He read out the full list of that zoologist's works, and there, too, the sublime and the ridiculous were reconciled, since in a list which included works of the greatest consequence was one entitled: *An Instance of Cunning in the Mole*.

June began gloriously. Thursday was the first day of the month. Georges, at their meeting, gave Alexander one of Father de Trennes' cigarettes—saying that they were a present from Lucien. He had, until then, hesitated to smoke them, inhibited by a kind of *pudor*. Moreover, it seemed to him that they might bring him bad luck. But then, blaming himself for such a

superstitious notion, he had made up his mind to smoke them after all, and he wanted the boy to share the act with him. After all, it would have given Father de Trennes pleasure.

Alexander let the match bum away between his fingers for as long as he could hold it.

“See,” he said, “it’s a good sign when it bums right to the end without breaking.”

It was as if he had guessed what had been passing in Georges’ mind and wanted to reassure him by a good omen. He had been pleased at the idea of smoking, but had soon sickened of it. Father de Trennes’ cigarette was cast away at the foot of an orange-tree. Georges remembered having noticed the smell of this particular tobacco when passing the Father’s door one night—the night that door had opened first to admit Alexander’s brother, subsequently the Superior. For all his philosophy he could not help finding these memories somewhat disagreeable. Had he not feared to appear no more grown-up than Alexander, he too would have thrown his cigarette away. As it was, he must try to think of something else. He took the Thespis picture from his wallet and gave it to Alexander, who had not yet seen it. The boy looked at it for a long time in silence, pressed it to his cheek, and set it up against the orange-tree by whose tub he had dropped his cigarette: like incense, the smoke of Egypt rose steadily towards Love.

That Sunday was interesting for several reasons: it was distinguished by being in Pentecost, by a solemn communion, and by being that month’s parents’ day. It was also the first Sunday on which the liturgical ornaments were red. As at the first mass in the October term, the colour which triumphed was not the colour of martyrdom but of the Holy Spirit. At the time Georges had amused himself by choosing to treat it as quite otherwise symbolic;

what followed had, it seemed to him, vindicated him.

At high mass he spotted his parents in the second row in the nave. He was content: they were well placed, and did him credit when compared with other parents. He knew that Alexander's were there, but did not know them. His days out with his people were always spent in the neighbouring town, where they took him out to luncheon, and he usually returned in the car, after those visiting parents who came by train had gone. But this time he would be back earlier, since he had to be present at vespers.

He looked in vain for a family resemblance to Alexander in the faces of visiting families. Which of the men looked like a doctor—Alexander's father practised medicine. But why bother? To the devil with fathers, temporal and spiritual. Alexander was sufficient unto himself. Like that god, in whose honour the Delphic temple had borne the inscription "He is", Alexander "was".

The officiating priest that day was a bishop *in partibus*, the Bishop of Pergamum. Hitherto the name had not suggested bishops to Georges, but an ephebus met with in a book from his father's library.

The Bishop of Pergamum was as stout and majestic a prelate as the Cardinal, on a former occasion, had been meagre and simple. He had been a pupil of St Claude's, and thereafter one of its masters. No doubt the fact of returning as a great man to that roof was giving him satisfaction. With what pride did he wear his mitre! It was not, certainly, being worn to the glory of God, but rather flaunted for the admiration of the boys, and of his erstwhile colleagues. Still, when his head was, for a brief space of time, uncovered, it was with an air of great good nature that he passed his hand over his bald head—perhaps with a

view to softening the hearts of old colleagues and entertaining the boys.

Mass over, Georges went to the visitors' room, where his parents were in conversation with Lucien's. He looked round the big, crowded room, trying to see if Alexander's parents were there. He saw him at last, with his brother, standing by a lady and gentleman who looked very nice. He was disturbed at the sight of these people: he had taken their son away from them. Alexander's mother had her hand on his neck, fair and graceful in the opening of his sports-shirt collar, and was idly playing with the gold chain which Georges had kissed at their first assignation.

Vespers was productive of a lamentable fiasco. The Bishop of Pergamum's preacher had, evidently, not studied rhetoric in that city. Poor dean of the chapter! How, in his pious violence, he did shake his fine lace rochet, his pectoral cross, his white and yellow ribbon, and ermine-trimmed cape! He even knocked off his spectacles, but caught them as they fell. Apostrophising his congregation, his cry of "Oh, Marie!" was, at one point, so bellowed that even the communicants could not keep their faces straight. Concerning the Holy Ghost he quoted St Bernard to the effect that "The Holy Spirit is the Kiss of God". Georges noted it as one more kiss to add to Father Lauzon's collection.

Finally, in contrast with the sweetness and light of the day's occasion, the dean dragged in a terrifying description of sin and hell. His performance recalled that sermon of the October Retreat occasioned by André's misfortunes. But that had been illustrated by the fate of the man of Balmes.

"Fire to the front, and fire behind, fire above and fire below, fire to the right, fire to the

left, fire everywhere, such is hell!” the orator thundered, “And from that terrible furnace whosoever dies in sin will never emerge—never, never, *never!*”

“Watch out for the twigs in your coat-of-arms,” Lucien whispered to Georges, “they’ll be going up in flames any moment now.”

The Superior was in a state of consternation. This was far, indeed, from Bossuet—nearer, with so much fire about, to the soufflé section of a cookery-book. He must be feeling ashamed before all his visitors. He may even have been regretting that he had not taken the risk of keeping Father de Trennes a little longer under his roof, to preach on this occasion. Had he, perhaps, forgotten that the choice of a good preacher is as difficult as the choice of a friend?

The next day, the Monday of Pentecost, the school went out for a ramble—and a notably attractive one, for they were going to the river to swim.



Three first-formers [English equivalent, sixth formers. The first form is the “Rhetoric” class. Trs.], the best of their form, were immediately behind Georges, Lucien and Maurice—on these walks they went in threes. The three rhetoricians were talking of sweethearts and surprise-parties. One of them, who had just said, “I simply live for dancing,” was teaching his neighbour ballroom etiquette. He said:

“You were wrong, at Easter, to dance with the same partner all the evening. I’m surprised you weren’t caught out by your people. One should dance with several girls in turn, and from time to time with one of the mothers.”

This made Georges and Lucien laugh.

“Here,” Maurice said, “it’s more usual to lead the Fathers a dance.” And he made waltzing motions with the belt which he had used to strap up his towel and bathing-slip.

They reached a point where the narrow valley broadened out and the river, which had been almost torrential until then, began to flow wide and slow through meadows, and spread to form a kind of small lake bordered by willows. There were cries of pleasure at the spectacle of wild gladiolus which, on both sides of the water, flaunted their red or white flowers among the grass.

“We could take bunches of them back for the altar of the Holy Virgin,” the Supervisor said, “but only pick white ones. The month of Mary is over, but the flowers of all the seasons are due, in homage to Her who is not only Queen of Heaven, but queen of the flowers—the mystical Rose.”

Which metaphors seemed to combine the language of both Father Lauzon and Father de Trennes in the Supervisor's mouth.

The boys scattered among the trees to change into bathing-slips, clad in which they shortly began to reappear. Georges looked at them in surprise. He hardly recognised them, never having seen them in this guise before; for showers were taken in single cubicles, and dormitory behaviour was extremely modest. But now even the physically ill-endowed were not wanting in grace: it was as if they were trying to bear themselves more handsomely in honour of the sun and their companions. One, usually so hideously awkward, was now transfigured; another, as a rule so clumsy in his clothes, yet trod the grass with style. And all the boys came running up at last, happy at being out of their clothes, free, proud, and almost insolent. And they seemed to take pleasure in putting off the moment when the water would hide their bodies. They leaped, turned somersaults, barged and wrestled each other on the improvised palestra provided by the turf. Until, at last, in one leap, they were all in the water, sending up a great spout of spray. Lucien went with them, but Georges sat down on the bank, his legs crossed under him: he was the scribe, about to observe and note their games. Here, at last, were *Gymnopaediae*.

The Supervisor, moreover, seemed equally unable to recognise his charges in these wild and naked young creatures, so that he considered himself deprived of authority over them. He went off gathering flowers and pretended to be seeing nothing. Then putting, no doubt, his faith in God, he sat down at the foot of a tree. He crossed himself and began to read his prayers, like some saint set down by devils in the very midst of a bacchanalia.

Yet what was going forward beside him was an eternal rite, the rite of the bath. This rite

had not, like the processions, the object of ensuring the fruits of the earth, but that, rather, of exposing the fruits of young bodies. The boys of St Claude's had returned as one to nature, their element.

The divers, gathered together upon a rock, raised their arms in an invocation, and then dived, each, religiously, in his proper order. Some swam as they listed; others raced. A few glided just below the surface, or swam under water, only their glistening behinds breaking surface. There were others who let themselves sink, supine, only to emerge suddenly and violently, like young tritons, spouting water. Others, to tease the Father—but he was as devoid of eyes as of ears—pulled off their slips and then shouted that they had lost them. Lucien, a prey to the general madness, gambolled in the stream, beat its surface with his hands, turned somersaults in the water, drunk with the joy simply of being. And even Georges, for a while, loved his college, since it could yield such moments.

He was not a good swimmer and did not want to be jeered at, even if it also meant showing off his beautiful maroon bathing-trunks decorated with a handsome monogram. He recalled the Latin proverb according to which the very slough of ignorance is to be unable to read or to swim. He felt himself to be an illiterate; here, at least, he was at the bottom of the form. He rose and moved downstream, so that he could bathe in something like privacy. After he had practised the lessons learnt, during the holidays at the swimming baths, he rested, lying flat in the water, his head under the bank in the shade of willow branches heavy with catkins. There he was invisible both from a distance, and from the opposite bank. What a pleasant hiding-place! It was a pity to be alone there.

To his left, and on the far bank, a sound of tumult was drawing near; it was the junior

school arriving. The seniors' Supervisor roused himself to summon his troops to concentrate them at the upper end of the lake-like sheet of water. With his breviary in one hand, the Holy Virgin's bouquet in the other, and his hat on the back of his head, Georges could see him making wide, imperative gestures, glad, no doubt, to be seized again of his authority.

Georges had not moved. Vainly, he strained his eyes, trying to pick out Alexander. But he had only to wait; inevitably, his friend would come to him as if to the genius of the river.

With what feverish haste, inspired by the spectacle of their elders, did the new arrival of bathers pull off their clothes! The first to be ready were already running up, yet their ardour was checked by hesitation: they shivered a little in the breeze, tested the water with their toes, crouched to wet hands and arms and even torsos. Others came up, bolder spirits, and plunged in without hesitating, splashing the timid. Then, like their elders, they became possessed of a sort of delirium; playing and fighting, they moved farther away.

Georges had not been less surprised by this spectacle than by the first one. He would never have believed that life radiated from every one of these puny schoolboys with such sweetness and such strength. But he was, likewise, aware that their nudity was misleading: these boys, the oldest as well as the youngest, had not put off all their veils. Those bodies, which they flaunted so shamelessly, yet remained their own private mysteries. In this college, where priestly masters never ceased from talking to them of God, each boy was his own priest, if not, indeed, his own god, sowing his own religion: each, then, a worthy continuator of those sacerdotal roles which the Greeks entrusted to boys.

But suddenly there were no more sights to observe, and no more thoughts: only a person. Crossing the meadow, among the willows, Alexander was drawing near, wearing a blue

bathing-slip. He had picked a red gladiolus and was amusing himself, as he walked, by trying to balance it upright on the palm of his hand. The thin gold chain danced about his neck. He was borne up by the sun's rays, for the grass-blades barely bent beneath his feet. Georges had never dreamed of a more exquisite vision, and he whispered to himself, "All my life I shall remember that I have seen this, that this happened."

Alexander, who was alone, had drawn near to the trees, facing those which concealed Georges. It was almost as if they had chosen the place for a meeting. They could not help but meet. Now Alexander was staring towards the senior boys, no doubt hoping to see Georges. But Georges, eager to go on feasting his eyes, preferred not to show himself yet. The idea that his own image was, at the moment, filling the mind's eye in that fair head across the river was intoxicating; as was the realisation that, in a moment, when he chose, they would be revealed to each other. Today was a feast-day in very truth, making up for the imaginary quality of the one which, on the second day of Rogations, Georges had conjured into existence and set under the skies which had looked down upon Hyacinthus.

Now, Alexander was looking the other way, towards his own division of the school. He stood with his right arm raised and pressing against the inclined trunk of a tree, while from his other hand the gladiolus hung down to his feet. *In thy splendour and thy beauty, come, triumph and reign.* Surely the liturgical text had been written in anticipation of this moment of glory. But what Georges was admiring was not only, as in other boys—a thousand times more than in other boys—an enchanting outward seeming; it was not, now, simply the Thespis Cupid. It was the divine incarnation of a soul divine, a mind altogether above the boy's age, and a heart full of strength, honesty and friendship.

The Supervisor's whistle signalled the end of their bathe to the senior school. Alexander, his attention caught, again turned his head that way. He stepped forward into the river, his hand raised to shield his eyes against the sun. Then, at last, Georges called to him, "*Ohé Ohé!*" Alexander turned his head and blushed violently. And, like an arrow, dived into the river as if to put an end to and punish the indiscreet admiration of which he had been the object. Where he had stood, only the gladiolus floated on the water; in the days of such miracles it would have been taken for his metamorphosis. Laughing, streaming with water, he appeared again, a drop of water hanging like a pearl to the lobe of each ear. He snatched up and threw the floating flower to his friend. And with that the most exquisite of their meetings was over.

Georges set off for his division, the long stalk of the gladiolus carried on his shoulder, like a staff. It was Alexander's turn to watch. Would he approve of maroon bathing-trunks? Georges saw the Supervisor coming towards him, still adding to his bouquet; there would be a reprimand for having wandered too far and returned late. But an act of kindness would no doubt soften him. Georges gave him Alexander's gladiolus for the Holy Virgin—a single touch of red would bring out the whiteness of the rest.

June was a gala month. The calendar announced, in large type, TUESDAY THE 6TH. SOLEMNISATION OF ST SLAUDE'S DAY. The Bishop had stayed on since Sunday, in order to preside over the ceremony.

Georges had been flattered when, upon their return from the river, the Prefect of Studies had named him as one of the choirboys who would serve the high mass. And the next morning, when he went to the chapel, he was sorry that his parents would not be there to see

him. He was even sorrier that Alexander was placed in the back row. He would have liked to parade before him in purple gown and cape, as yesterday in maroon bathing-trunks.

He was struck by the scent of flowers with which the altars had been almost smothered. It was like walking into a conservatory even more fragrant than their meeting-place. That conservatory was, indeed, represented by the pot-plants which had been used to decorate the choir. These plants had frequently been used for the same purpose in the same place, but this time the impression they made on Georges was a new one: he saw himself as arriving at another of his assignments with Alexander. At this point in his reflections he opened the door into the sacristy and saw Alexander, with other acolytes, dressing for duty.

André and Lucien had been brought together at the altar by the Dominican preacher. Georges and Alexander were about to be similarly united by the Bishop of Pergamum. Neither of them was to carry the censer, yet it seemed to Georges that all the honours of this occasion were for them. It was to signalise *their* triumph that the gorgeous Lord Bishop was putting on the gold-embroidered tunic, dalmatic and chasuble. Their triumph, then, was no longer secret, but publicly celebrated. Father de Trennes' mass was nothing by comparison with this one. Before they left the sacristy Georges found the courage to make a swift adjustment to Alexander's cape: there was nobody to be afraid of there.

Nevertheless, there remained, in the chapel itself, someone who must still be managed: Father Lauzon was still at St Claude's, still mathematics master, director of the Congregation, confessor to Georges, Alexander, Lucien, *e tutti quanti*. What must he now be thinking of the first two named? Was he deploring their physical closeness to each other, or, on the contrary, edified by their bearing in that nearness? Was he thinking that, like Father de

Trennes, really, his colleagues were sometimes altogether too naïve, and that he should have been consulted? Or was he, rather, thinking that it had been an excellent idea to choose two such personable boys for the solemnisation of the college's principal anniversary? Perhaps he was even confirming, mentally, his promise to reunite them in friendship. The sun, sending its rays through the stained glass of a window, crowned them with jewels: here, again, the liturgy had not lied. The gladioli brought back from the river were arranged at the feet of the Holy Virgin. There was only one red one.

At vespers a panegyric on St Claude was followed by a procession to the grotto where his statue was set. The hymn for the day rang loud and clear,

*Hail to thee, worthy and venerated father!*  
*Turn thine eyes, O Claude, upon thy sons!*

The procession halted on the terrace outside the conservatory, the grotto being beneath it. Alexander had, by a glance, directed Georges' attention to the orange-trees, which had been brought out to decorate the terrace. The Bishop of Pergamum advanced, attended by his deacons; then, raising his head, as if he were looking up to the terrace, he called down a blessing upon this venerated place. It occurred to Georges that, the year before, André and Lucien had seen the same thing happen.

On the day after the morrow, Georges and Alexander met again, in the conservatory. They spoke of their two fortuitous encounters. Alexander seemed thoughtful. He spread out

his left hand and studied his palm. He asked Georges, "Do you believe in fortune-telling by the hand?"

"Yes, if it foretells nice things."

"This afternoon, out on our walk, a fellow in my class who knows how to do it, did mine and he said I would die young."

"Idiot! I expect he's jealous of you and said it to upset you. Forget it. It's all rubbish. Voltaire was told he would die young. Actually, he died at over eighty!"

He seized the boy's hands, stooped as if to examine them, and kissed them. He said, "There—a spell laid on your fate!" Alexander had done almost as much for him, in the matter of the burning match, when it was Georges who was feeling superstitious. Alexander's spirits rose again, and he told Georges that he was to play the part of a page in *Richard Cœur de Lion*: this was the short play, including several songs, which the junior school was contributing to the general rejoicings of prize day. They congratulated themselves on this new favour shown them by destiny. Rehearsals would ensure numerous opportunities of seeing each other. They felt themselves to be under the protection of their own persons, which had procured them their roles. They were indispensable to the good conduct of the establishment. It seemed that no festival, sacred or profane, was complete without them. And even if Father Lauzon had not yet come over to their side, he could not but consider himself obviously lagging behind events. Besides, he would probably think that, the holidays being in sight, they might as well be allowed to renew the ties of friendship, since, in the new school year, they would both be in senior school.

Alexander had already seen his costume for the play: red doublet, white hose, feathered

cap. He was pleased with the red doublet, preferring it to the acolyte's gown.

"I shall be wearing your colour," he said. "I can be *your* page, since you're a nobleman! You know, I've never once thought of that before, since we met—I mean, you being noble—that is since you stopped being 'de Sarre' and became 'Georges'. It's fine to be a nobleman."

"Not so fine as being handsome, my fine page!"

"I suppose you have a coat of arms, like Richard Cœur de Lion."

"Oh, but mine is less intimidating! Just a poor little fire of dry twigs."

The following Sunday afternoon, June 11th, exactly one month before the holidays, they had the first rehearsal of *Les Plaideurs*. Since the rhetoricians and philosophers were absorbed in preparing for their examinations, most of the actors had been recruited from the second and third forms. Georges was playing Léandre, Lucien Isabelle. The latter piece of casting had been a triumph for Georges. He had accepted his own part as soon as it was offered to him; but then he had begun to have doubts, since it was not known who would play Isabelle. The Prefect, who was organising the play, was hesitating between several of the prettier boys in the fourth. Georges asked Lucien to offer himself for the part, and his offer had been accepted. Georges had not wanted to find himself uttering sweet compliments, even in Racine's name, to anybody of whom Alexander might conceivably have been jealous. With Lucien, it did not matter; it would simply be one more lark.

The college nuns had set about altering the costumes to fit the actors. Georges was as pleased with his dress of white and gold as Alexander with his doublet and hose. He chose the fairest wig he could find and, contrary to all precedent, persuaded the Isabelle to wear

an auburn wig.

During the first rehearsal Georges thought of Alexander, who was away bathing in the river again, yet he was not sorry to have been kept back himself. A new arrangement was in force; no more showers, but swimming in the river. But, in view of the confusion of the last occasion, the seniors were to go on Thursdays, the juniors on Sundays. Georges and Alexander had exchanged a promise always to bathe in the place where they had encountered each other on that Monday in Pentecost.

Meeting, as usual, on Thursday, they discussed the holidays. They were determined not to let three months go by without seeing each other. Both knew that their respective families would be going to the seaside at the end of July, but they did not yet know what places had been chosen. It was important to find out as soon as possible. Georges said that he could be sure of persuading his people to go wherever he wanted them to. André and Lucien had succeeded in a similar enterprise last summer; he could surely do as much. With all the prizes he would be taking home, they would be unable to refuse him anything. He could already see himself in the midst of the waves, with Alexander.

“By then,” he said, “I shall be able to swim. You can swim already. We’ll be able to swim together far out to sea. And afterwards lie on the sands for hours, together, in the sun.”

“Yes,” Alexander said, in a strange voice, “and we’ll swop swim-suits.”

This phrase, which concluded their conversation, made an impression upon Georges. He had not said anything about it to his friend, but that night, in bed, he was still thinking of it. It seemed to him to constitute a point of departure not towards the friendly sea, but rather

towards that “dangerous sea” which he had noticed on the Map of Love. He recalled Father de Trennes’ suggestion that he and Lucien should swop pyjamas. And here was a boy not yet thirteen years old conceiving a notion of the same kind! Was it memories of their meeting at the river, working upon his imagination, and perhaps over-heating it a little? Or did it, rather, derive from the, quite literal, hot-house atmosphere in which their friendship was developing and their plans maturing? Father Lauzon had not been mistaken; whatever is clandestine may too easily take a very undesirable turn.

In the Corpus Christi procession the two friends were not placed side by side, nor were they officiating choir-boys. What a number of processions there were! However, this one was, like the Rogation processions, at least endowed with indulgences; the St Claude’s Day procession had had nothing but its own merit to recommend it.

They went in processional through the village. Beyond, the path was dotted with low, flowering broom and Georges took pleasure in thinking of Alexander treading that fragrant way. Several resting-places had been prepared outside houses on their route. Cottage doors were masked by branches of wild cherry in flower, and decorated with ferns, through which rabbit skins, nailed out to dry, could be seen. At each aspersion, the peasantry pressed forward, so as to receive a few drops of holy water on their hands, which they then piously kissed. There were old women who knelt as they passed, their kerchiefs under their knees. A fat man stood, his hands behind his back, and stared at them stupidly.

On their way back there burst forth the most extraordinary cacophony which Georges had ever heard. The junior school Supervisor had set his division to sing the *Sacris solemniis*

while, at the same moment, his senior school colleague gave the signal to strike up the *Lauda Sion*. Meanwhile the choir began singing the *Pange Lingua*. There was a moment of uproarious disharmony, then the juniors took up the *Lauda Sion*, just as the seniors decided to give way and sing the *Sacris solemniis*, the choir continuing to sing their own hymn. Needless to say they all persisted in making the confusion last as long as possible, while the chapel master rushed backwards and forwards between the divisions, trying to establish concord, and the choir split, half opting for the senior, half for the junior hymn.

Thursday: the boy, as on the time before last, was thoughtful. Georges asked him if his mind still ran on palmistry.

“I’m ashamed of what I said to you last time, before we parted. We will *not* swop bathing-things, on holiday.”

Georges smiled: he was delighted that his friend had realised and corrected his mistake.

“No wonder I am so fond of you!” he said. “I admit that I was quite shocked by what you suggested, but I doubted whether you had really understood its significance.”

Alexander, too, was now restored to happiness. Their former conversation about things which-ought not to be known about, or at least ought not to be done, had reassured him as far as Georges was concerned; and now he had reassured himself about himself, too. Nothing, now, could tarnish their friendship.

“I’ve thought of something much better,” he said. “We’ll both buy red bathing-trunks, and distinguish one from the other by a mark—say an embroidered flower, or a monogram, like yours.”

“Hurrah for red bathing-trunks!” Georges said. “It’s the traditional wrestlers’ uniform. But I’m agreeably surprised you should have noticed my monogram, since it’s in the same colour as the rest.”

“I notice everything to do with you. Whenever we’re going to meet I amuse myself by betting with myself whether you’ll be wearing a blue shirt with your red tie, or a white one, or beige, or pink, or grey—I know all your shirts by heart. I prefer the blue ones, they suit you best.”

“And blue suits *you* most elegantly,” Georges said, “and nothing suits you better than your blue bathing-trunks.” Alexander raised a finger to his lips to enjoin silence.

“Hush!” he said.

On Sunday Pelion was again, as it were, piled upon Ossa; that is, the Superior’s name day and the Feast of the Sacred Heart had both to be celebrated. This occurrence was the consequence of a sort of shuffle: the Superior’s name was Jean, so that his day was really the 24th, which fell on a Saturday, but it had been carried forward to the next day and combined with the Sacred Heart, which actually fell on the Friday. The grand expedition, traditional to the Superior’s name day, had been put off until the following Thursday. Anything to do with the Superior was apt to entail such complications.

In senior study, a philosopher, as spokesman, offered their good wishes, as laid down in the rules. He responded by wishing his pupils “that interior flame and light” whose symbol is the nativity of the Forerunner. He then betook himself to junior study to hear, and to say, the same things.

Georges was thinking of the lecture on religious astronomy which the Superior had delivered yesterday—the real St John's Day. The day, he said, marked the zenith of the sun's annual course; thereafter, it begins to decline. In the same way, St John had said: "He must grow greater, and I must diminish." And in fact the nativity of Jesus, to which that of St John is the prelude, opens the period when the sun begins to climb again.

And Georges thought, "My sun, my own saviour, also rose over my horizon about Christmas-time, but he'll never decline." During the Sacred Heart processions he read in his book, in the anthem, certain words which had a bearing on his case. "Set Me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal set Me upon thine arm." The seal which he and Alexander had set upon their friendship was inviolable—not the *Bien-Aimé* poem, but the little cut they had made in their arms, so as to merge their souls with an exchange of a few drops of blood.

Everything seemed easy to Georges, he was no longer afraid of any conceivable danger. The prospect of the holidays and the fullness of his heart rendered all obstacles contemptible. On his way to the Academy he went past junior study and deliberately stopped by an open window. He looked at Alexander who was prevented from smiling by the Supervisor's presence, as Georges had been prevented from smiling from the lectern by the presence of Father Lauzon and, particularly, of Father de Trennes. The sun, shining through the class-room window, touched the boy's fair head to gold. The time had gone by when Georges contemplated the boy only secretly, furtively, through the misted windows of a winter evening; and gone was the time when, just after receiving his first note from Alexander, he broke into lyricism in his weekly letter home, on the subject of sunshine in study. Now, he considered himself as free in college as at home, where he could re-read

Alexander's notes without trying to hide them. The pale sun of February had shone upon their friendship in its beginnings; but, on the first Sunday of high summer, that same friendship had the golden finish of a ripe fruit.

At the Congregation meeting Georges did not fall away from his new boldness. His ardour was greater even than after the five acts of *Polyeucte*, and his victory over Father de Trennes made him take a high and mighty view of Father Lauzon. Instead of sitting in his usual place, he moved over among the fourth-form Congregationists, sitting immediately behind Alexander. Opening his book as they went down on their knees to pray, he let a picture fall out and flutter onto Alexander's legs. The boy turned, but, seeing Georges, did not dare to pick it up. Courage had changed sides. Georges, leaning forward to recover the picture, pinched Alexander's calf.

The grand outing was worthy of the name: it lasted an entire day, during which the two divisions of the school were combined. It was usual to leave the college very early in the morning, carrying both lunch and tea, and not to return until nightfall. They were to spend the day, as they had done the year before, at an estate a few miles from St Claude's belonging to the family of a senior boy, the Dandin of *Les Plaideurs*. Lucien told Georges that he had very much enjoyed this hospitality last year; not, however, because of the park, nor for the chateau, but because of the gardener's hut where he had spent a whole hour alone with André. However, having smoked too many cigarettes, he had been sick.

"It's difficult for them to keep an eye on us there," he explained. "It'll be your turn to take advantage of the fact. You can follow in our footsteps to the hut, as you did to the

conservatory.”

Senior and junior schools met at the school gate, but then took different ways. Georges and Alexander managed to exchange a joyous sign, acknowledging that they would be meeting shortly. What a radiant day! It would lack nothing. And Georges strode along lightheartedly, sure that never had any living creature trod the earth as happily as he did.

Presently, they had to walk in single file, taking a narrow path which scaled the mountain. Near the summit there was a waterfall, and its spray refreshed them. It was all new country to Georges, and he was enchanted with it. Below and beyond were huge stone flags, vestiges of a Roman road, which led to the main road by which the juniors, in a more compact party, would be arriving. Georges thought of the men who had passed along the Roman road in times past; and perhaps there had been others like himself, a friend on his way to meet a waiting friend, like the one whose impatient inscription has been preserved at Pompeii. It seemed to him that this ancient road had been destined, since the days of its building, to bear him towards Alexander. It was bordered by fields of cotton, an unusual crop in that country, an innovation on the part of the people whose estate he was about to visit. The boys stepped, as they walked, on fluffy cotton bolls, blown off by the wind.

“First Rome; now Egypt,” Georges said to Lucien. “We’re covering a lot of ground.”

“Didn’t you forget your Egyptian cigarettes?”

“No. I shall smoke them in the hut—but without making myself sick, I hope.”

At last they came to an avenue of oaks, at the end of which the chateau appeared, their destination. This vast fabric, which seemed to Georges in rather bad taste, by no means recalled his family’s chateau, where he would be spending a part of the holidays. “There

are,” he thought, “chateaux *and* chateaux, just as there are kisses *and* kisses, etcetera, etcetera . . .” Many of the windows were bricked up, in order, it was said, to reduce the taxes. The senior division came to a halt in front of the mansion, to witness the greetings exchanged between the Superior and their hosts: the son of the house stood preening himself proudly beside his parents.

Lucien led Georges to a place from which he could point out the famous hut, half-hidden in a stand of conifers.

“There it is!” he said. And the portentous sweep of the arm with which he indicated it made both of them laugh.

A few minutes later the juniors arrived. The prefects of the two divisions, surrounded by the rest, set noisily about laying down a programme of sporting events. While everyone was listening to their discussion of sack races, egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races and others, Georges slipped through the crowd to Alexander’s side, and gently squeezed his hand. Under cover of the general uproar he whispered, close to his ear, “Don’t enter for anything. After lunch, when the sports begin, follow me.”

He wanted lunch to be over and done with; it seemed to be going on for ever. Their hosts had been kind enough to serve them with iced coffee. Maybe it would mean bricking up yet another window. The Bursar, centre of a group, was giving details of everything which had been eaten at St Claude’s that year: so many tons of this, that, and the other. But at last people were moving away towards a wide avenue.

Georges made a sign to Alexander. Without turning his head he set off, walking fast, then, hidden by a tree, stopped to look cautiously back. When Alexander drew near, Georges

called to him—"To the hut," and set off again, dodging from tree to tree, until he came to the little house, and went in. A moment later Alexander burst in after him. Georges had not even heard him coming: the pine-needles densely carpeting the ground had deadened the sound of his feet.

They looked over their domain, which was lit by a small window without shutters. A bucket, turned upside down, served as a seat. They shoved it into a corner, among gardening tools, and lay down on a big truss of straw which seemed to have been put there for their benefit. They had both taken off their jackets. Alexander was wearing a short-sleeved sports shirt; he showed Georges the little scar remaining from their April ceremony. He was very proud of having kept this mark on his arm; in Georges' case it had disappeared.

"I have been thinking about our holidays," Georges said. "If we are to meet, we must be able to exchange letters. I've given a lot of thought to it and I can see only two ways; the first is to make use of the poste restante system."

Alexander wanted to know whether, at his age, he would be allowed to receive letters poste restante. Georges did not know. But in any case Alexander said that he would feel very shy of going and asking for letters. Besides, wasn't that sort of thing under police surveillance?

"The other way would be safer," Georges said, "and would keep it in the family, so to speak. It is, quite simply, to take Maurice into our confidence and get him to let me write to you but address the letters to him. I don't entirely like the idea myself: it means that our friendship will no longer be a secret. But it's bound to be public property anyway, after the holidays. So why not confide in someone who'll be very useful to us now? And don't worry:

I know just what to say to Maurice, just as I knew how far to go in telling Lucien. As regards my letters, they'll be in two envelopes, added to which I shall ask your brother to give me his word of honour never to open one. He certainly won't refuse; he's under an obligation to me in a small matter of school work—oh, nothing very serious, but it gives me a hold.”

In yielding to these arguments, Alexander showed no curiosity as to the nature of his brother's behaviour which had given Georges his hold. Georges was relieved. He would have been sorry to have to recall Father de Trennes in their present happy condition, even though disguised in some fiction or other.

Their respective parents' holiday plans, as elicited by both friends in recent letters home, were not, alas! in accord: Alexander's people were proposing to go to the Cote d'Azur, and

Georges' to the Basque coast. But Georges was not unduly concerned.

“I'll move Heaven and earth to get them to change,” he said. “Maurice will be more useful to us than ever. I shall say that I have to meet him, and some other chaps, and that this meeting is something sponsored by the college.

“By prize-giving you'll probably know what place your people have chosen. If, by any chance, they haven't decided by then, you can write and tell me when they do make up their minds, and meanwhile I'll keep my own family stalling. Anyway, don't let's worry: wherever you are, and wherever I am, I'll get to you somehow.”

“Anyway,” Alexander said, “I shall certainly have a special message for you on July 16th. Can you guess why?”

“It's jolly nice of you to start remembering my birthday already! And I shan't forget

September 11th either—St Hyacinth’s Day. You at least chose a decent day to be bom on. Whereas I was twenty-four hours too late, so I’ve a choice—according to the various calendars, sacred and profane—between St Helier, St Hilarion, St Alain, St Éstelle, St Reinelde, St Mary-Magdalen Postel, and the commemoration of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. As you see, I’ve been very thoroughly into it. And with all those saints offered me, I missed St Alexis by one day! It’s a great pity. Alexis and Hyacinthus were made for each other.”

Alexander asked Georges to repeat the first of the rigmarole of names he had recited, and then he said, “You don’t need me to tell you that, according to etymology, Helier is the sun. And it was you who told me the sun was Hyacinthus’ friend.”

There followed a silence between them. Georges was delighting in the presence of his friend, who lay, unseen, beside him. They both reclined on their backs, with their eyes on the window, which framed an oblong of sky, fretted by the branch of a pine-tree with its delicate foliage. The distant shouts associated with the official sports emphasised and sweetened their solitude. Limpid and musical, Alexander’s voice broke the silence.

“At night, from my bed, I can see the stars through the open window. I talk to them about you.”

Georges, wishing to attend even to the last echo of these words, did not answer at once. Then he said, “I want, before we break up, to know where your bed is, in the dormitory. I must know that; I want my memories of this year to be quite complete.”

Alexander told him which row it was in, the number on his towels, and the colour of the bedspread.

“Have you realised,” Georges said, “that next term we shall be in the same dormitory? There’s not a hope of our being next to each other, because it goes in forms, but I shall be able to see you, we’ll be able to smile at each other before they put the lights out. And when you wake up, all shock-headed, in the morning, it’s me you’ll look for first thing of all. In study, you’ll be in front of me, being in the fourth. You’ll lighten my work. And so that our hand-writings can be mixed up together, you can give me your blotting-paper, after you’ve used it.

“We shan’t be able to talk to each other much, in breaks—we shall have to watch our step. But we can exchange notes every day. I’ll send you a note every morning and you can answer it every evening. We shan’t be far apart in chapel, if they group us by voices. In the refectory, when you want me to keep my fruit for you, you’ll only need to make me a sign. And I’ll give you some of my things, at tea-time.

“In summer, we shall be able to bathe together on outing days, just as we shall have done during the holidays. College will be one long holiday for us . . .”

Alexander, in a low voice, said, “I love you more than life itself.”

He was very young; not yet thirteen. Did he still believe that the words he spoke were in the language of friendship merely? Georges looked at him. Alexander had closed his eyes, now opened them very wide, as if emerging from a dream, and sat up.

“Let’s smoke a cigarette,” he said.

“Are you trying to make me lose my head entirely?”

“I am trying to keep mine.”

Georges took the packet of Egyptian cigarettes out of his pocket. He lit two, gave one to

Alexander, then, after a moment or two, suggested that they exchange cigarettes. Smiling, Alexander agreed.

“Not bad!” he said.

He amused himself by blowing puffs of smoke over Georges, who returned the compliment, each trying to dodge the smoke the other blew at him. They were laughing at this game, which grew rougher, until it turned into a wrestling bout on the straw.

Suddenly a shadow darkened the window: it was cast by Father Lauzon’s face. A few seconds later he thrust open the door and entered the hut. Georges was on his feet in an instant. Alexander rose slowly to his.

The expression on the priest’s face was not one of anger, but rather of grief and disgust. He had his breviary in his hand, closed on his forefinger to mark his place. He stared at the straw, where the bodies of the two boys had left their imprints. He trod out the two cigarettes, which lay smouldering in a corner. Father de Trennes’ cigarettes, like the ones which the Superior had seen in the Father’s room on the night when Maurice had been his guest. Father Lauzon’s arrival in the gardener’s hut echoed the Superior’s in his erstwhile Supervisor’s room.

And now, what? Would Father Lauzon march Alexander and Georges back before him, shamefully, like a couple of thieves caught by a policeman? Would he set them on their knees, against a tree, before the whole school? He might even think himself free to begin by striking them both. But all he did, in point of fact, was to say, sorrowfully, “Unhappy boys!”

Alexander, hitherto indifferent, at that smiled impertinently. Georges hastened, as he had done on the day they were confronted with each other, to intervene.

“I am sorry——” he began. But the priest cut him short with a gesture.

“Return at once, both of you, to your respective divisions.”

They put on their jackets. In doing so Georges automatically glanced at his wrist-watch. Half-past three. An hour he would remember. The packet of cigarettes fell out of his pocket. He did not dare to pick it up.

Alexander had set off walking fast, and Georges thought it best to let him get well ahead. He glanced back to see if the priest was following them: he was standing, motionless, in the doorway of the hut, as if turned, like Lot’s wife, into a pillar of salt.

Alexander was waiting for Georges not far from the other boys. He said, proudly, “All this doesn’t count—for us.”

But Georges had a presentiment that henceforth there was someone they must count with, and that the days of their happiness, too, were counted.

They rejoined their groups without attracting attention. Lucien very soon lost the sly smile with which he had welcomed Georges. He listened to him with an expression of consternation, but quickly recovered.

“Obviously,” he said, “it’s a rotten business. But you and Alexander have been lucky in one respect—I mean that it was Lauzon who caught you. He’s your confessor, Alexander’s too, and a personal friend of the Motiers. He’s already saved you once; he recently saved Maurice, whose situation was even worse. He really ought to get a life-saving medal! He has established a definite attitude towards you. You notice he didn’t immediately punish you. The whole thing can be arranged, you’ll see—a few *mea culpas* before his “Adoration of the Lamb” will fix it.

Father Lauzon approached, reading his breviary—probably the Lives of the Apostles Peter and Paul. Georges recalled the first words in the service for those same apostles, and the fact that the first words were all he had read. “You have tried me, O Lord, and know me. Standing and seated, You know me for what I am.”

It was a wretched end to the Grand Outing. For Georges, the qualification had acquired an ironical sound: the Grand Outing would surely be the most miserable outing of his life.

Seniors and juniors swapped routes for the return journey. It was Alexander’s turn to go by the Roman road between fields of cotton. Since they were not obliged to keep strictly to the ranks, he might, perhaps, be walking alone, alone with his thoughts, since he had no friend to try to cheer him up. He might, by now, have realised that what had happened to them today was serious. The friendship which Georges and he had supposed as eternal as Athens or Rome was revealed as a feather in the wind.

Behind Georges and Lucien, Maurice was walking and joking in high-spirited company. He had both more and fewer reasons than he suspected for being merry: he who had nearly got him expelled in the matter of Father de Trennes, was now himself apt to be expelled—but in company with Maurice’s brother. Sublimely ignorant of any such problems, Maurice was asking one of his companions to repeat the words of a waltz tune:

*Blonde rêveuse,  
Douce charmeuse,  
Dans l’air tu fais flotter  
Le parfum du baiser . . .*

When he had quite mastered words and music, Maurice said, "To think of the rubbish they make us learn by heart, when there's stuff as nice as this we could be learning!"

To Lucien, Georges said, "Remember what he was saying the other day about leading the Fathers a dance? It looks as if I'm joining that dance myself."

"Dear old Sardinet," Lucien said affectionately, "I'm absolutely stuffed with remorse about all this. If I hadn't suggested that blasted hut, none of this would have happened."

"Cut it out! If anyone's to blame, it's the gardener, for not sweeping up those pine needles. Besides, I owe you the idea of the conservatory, too, and nobody's ever caught us there."

He could hardly tell Lucien that his scruples were superfluous, since it was he, Georges, who had got André expelled. They were quits.

Near St Claude's, Georges noticed the cut branches of foliage beside the road, reminders of Corpus Christi. They had passed them on their way out that morning, but he had not then noticed that the foliage was dead: he raised his eyes and looked towards the mountain.

He was returning vanquished to the house he had left triumphant. It seemed to him that everything was changed, that the life had gone out of the place, leaving nought but stones. The college had ceased to be an enchanted garden and would never be all that he had promised Alexander. He would have liked to see the walls about him in ruins, as he would have liked to think that the dropped cigarettes had set fire to that hut!

Dinner was an animated occasion. Even the Superior, with his hair uncombed, had a positively roguish air! Georges was even less hungry than on the night André had been

expelled. He and Alexander must be the only ones to whom the long walk had not given an appetite.

He looked at the boy whose father's estate had been the setting for the day's events, and who was playing the part of Georges' father in *Les Plaideurs*. He, lucky fellow, had returned aggrandised by turrets, iced coffee and fields of cotton. But, in his gardener's hut, the most beautiful friendship in the whole school had come to grief.

Up in the dormitory Lucien made another attempt to cheer Georges up.

"I do wonder," he said, "why you are so anxious. Are you forgetting who you are? Remember that in twelve days from now you'll be receiving the first prizes for excellence, diligence, etcetera—the lot. The Fathers are delighted at having a name like yours at the top of their honours list. There'll be a whole year, in which you've shone at everything, to consider—the Academy, the Congregation, the choir on St Claude's day, at the refectory lectern, and on the stage. All they'll want is to keep you here, and let you do as you like. But it's up to you to know how to go about it, how to make the most of your advantages. You're thinking that they're going to kick you out. Well, if I were in your shoes, I should be laying down my conditions for staying on.

"As for Alexander, Father Lauzon must be just as anxious to keep him here. In fact, he's no alternative, since he answered for Alexander to the Superior, three months ago. Furthermore, didn't he fix things with Alexander's family, three months ago? Well, clearly, he's in the same fix there! He can't simply admit that he's been an ass! So even supposing he's prepared to admit that he was wrong to the Superior—there's the Motiers' parents to consider: what would they make of a man who puts everything to rights at Easter, only to

mess it all up again at Trinity?

“No. As I say, today’s business, following exactly on the precedent set by the last hullabaloo, will come to nothing but a bit of sermonising. You and Alexander will emerge as white as snow after a good bath in holy water. You’ll have to play your hand all the more carefully next year, but that’ll do you good. Your friendship won’t be allowed to sink into slumber in all the delights of Capua. You’ll be kept constantly on the alert, it will all be just as if you’re still at the beginning. My separation from André had the same effect: Heaven, obviously, has determined to preserve all four of us from mere facility.”

Father Lauzon pointed to a chair facing him. He was still showing consideration, but this time Alexander had not been summoned. Father Lauzon himself sat on an ordinary chair. As a rule he took the armchair. For some moments he kept silence. Was he recalling the day when, after their first escapade, Georges’ and the college angel had been hauled before him?

“I do not know,” he said at length, “whether it is depravity or ignorance which is uppermost in you. The little game I interrupted yesterday was hardly calculated to prepare me to see you take holy communion this morning. I thank God, who allowed me to catch you out in that sacrilege, for it will, at least, enable me to make sure that this does not happen again. Is that clear?”

His voice had risen and his tone had become imperious. Head rigid, he stared at Georges. The priest’s opening words, and the haughty, dominating manner of his conclusion, were provoking Georges to insolence. But he humbled his pride, which was less fiery than Alexander’s. Nor was it dependent upon what a Father Lauzon thought of him. On his way to

the Father's study he had kept telling himself: "Remember—cunning, cunning—be as cunning as a fox." He remembered, now, the reply which he had used to avoid the inquisitiveness of Father de Trennes, and which had saved Maurice from any real investigation by the Superior; the standard St Claude's answer. He said:

"I make communion every day and I have never done so excepting in a state of Grace. You have no right to doubt me on the strength of mere appearances."

"I no longer 'doubt' you. I *know*—and my knowledge comes, alas! from an unquestionable source—that sacred things have never had any meaning for you. As to mere appearances, your piety has never been anything else. And do you dare to use such terms as 'in a state of Grace'? Refrain, henceforth, from profaning such expressions! The secret life you have been leading is a denial of faith."

"I swear to you," Georges said, firmly, "that yesterday was my first meeting this term with Alexander Motier."

"I can only say, then, that it is a pity that Alexander Motier has just told me that you and he will manage to meet despite all I can do, in the future, as you have always done in the past. Your only means of avoiding swearing false oaths is to swear none, as your only means of showing reverence for the sacraments is to abstain from them henceforth, after having made an odious mockery of them.

"You need not give yourself the trouble of coming to my confessional. That particular criminal fraud has been going on long enough. I am restoring the direction of your conscience, if, indeed, I ever exercised it, to you. Believe me, it is with real sorrow that I must thus abandon you to a fate which appals me, but I am not to be fooled more than once.

In leaving you in God's hands, I shall continue to pray to Him, that He may enlighten you and save you in your hour of need, by such means as He shall have chosen.



“For the rest, you need not be unduly disturbed as to the merely temporal aspect of this business. I shall say nothing to M. le Supérieur, nor to anyone else. But it goes without saying that I shall be obliged to warn both your families should you and young Motier make any attempt, of whatever kind, to get into touch with each other. That being understood, I have only one thing to require of you: not to return here next year.”

In spite of Lucien’s observations, Georges had foreseen this requirement, which appeared to him ineluctable. His case was of the same nature as Father de Trennes’. The Superior had not allowed his friendship for a man who had abused his trust and departed from his principles to weigh with him. Father Lauzon would not show him any more mercy; he, too, was revenging himself, and God. Unwittingly, moreover, he was avenging Father de Trennes.

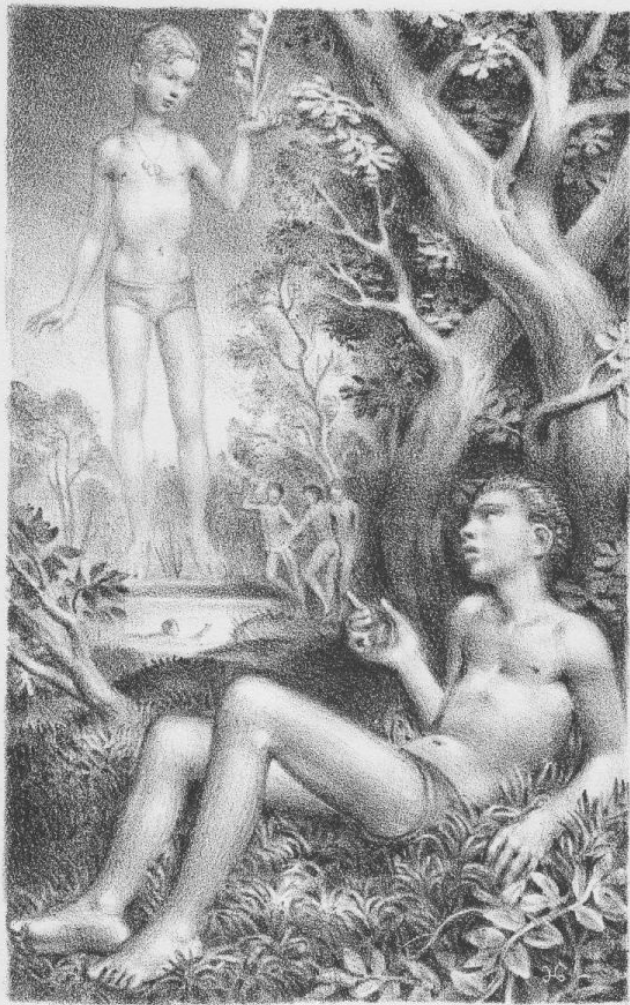
Georges, then, was reduced to being no more than a boy who was being turned out of the school; there was a great difference between having imagined this state of affairs and the reality. He was surprised at himself for not bursting into tears. Yet his clearheadedness was not clouded by his misery. Instead, it suggested that he might make a last supreme effort to soften his adversary’s heart. He took out his handkerchief, which he had scented that morning, and ostentatiously applied it to his eyes.

“I implore you,” said the Father, “to spare me that comedy. Your tears are false. The only true thing about you is that scent Up there in the mountains you opened, for me, a window into your heart. Through it I can see false pride, hypocrisy, and an even more serious vice.

How I pity the future Marquis de Sarre!”

Georges pretended to wipe his nose, then, coldly, replaced the handkerchief in his pocket.

Father Lauzon resumed: “It remains for me to indicate the plans which I have made for the last few days of term. At the end of last term I had already taken certain steps to deal with your accomplice; it is needless to say that these arrangements will be more strictly enforced than ever. I will run over them for you. In no circumstances will you absent yourself from your group. During the long breaks you will be good enough not to go to piano practice—the sacrifice of a few minutes’ harmony is hardly too much to ask. In study periods there are to be no visits to your masters; if you have any questions to ask them, then ask them at the end of the lesson. At rehearsals of *Les Plaideurs* you will not leave your companions.



“Your Supervisor has received instructions not to allow you to leave the room alone. To save your face, and to some extent my own, I have told him that you have asked me to impose this constraint upon you by way of mortification. I ask your forgiveness, and his, for making a mockery of that expression, which is worthy, indeed, of yourself. But I added that it was with the object of preventing you from smoking, which is at least half true, is it not?

“I may have given you the impression that, apart from your expulsion, I shall inflict no other punishment. There is one, however, which cannot possibly be avoided: it is, in some sort, a moral one. I am not, naturally, alluding to that of dismissing you from the Congregation, where I hope you would not have had the effrontery to appear again. No, this will touch you more nearly; it concerns one of your prizes. There are certain laurels which I cannot permit you to gather—those for religious instruction, to which you had, as I am informed, every reason to aspire. You will admit that the buffoonery would really be excessive. Worse, it would be a sort of sacrilege and that I cannot allow. As it happens, the decisive secret composition on religious instruction takes place on the day after tomorrow. That will give us an opportunity to put this matter in order, without bringing any third party into this deplorable business. All you need do is to write an indifferent paper—not too obviously bad—such as will ensure your not receiving the prize. If you are awarded an *accessit* that will not be the same thing: it will be a reward for your good memory, fancy and irony—and I will certainly not repeat, for your mortification.

“I shall take steps to check your performance. In the event of my finding that you have

disobeyed me, I shall be forced to take the matter to the Superior: in that case you will be publicly expelled and your name expunged from the list of honours and prizes. Your choice is between losing one prize, and all your prizes. Or, rather, between losing a prize and provoking a further scandal. And do not make the mistake of defying me by returning here at the beginning of the new school year. You will be making the journey for nothing. You will have to invent some honourable pretext for the benefit of your parents. I need not say that, should you feel yourself unable to lie to them, I shall be ready to explain the circumstances to them. I should prefer to think, however, that our present talk will be our last. We have nothing more to say to each other.

“One final word. In the past you were wont to amuse yourself by pretending to seek my advice in the matter of your reading. Let me recommend a short treatise by M. Hamon entitled *The Twenty-three Motives for being Humble*.”

Father Lauzon rose and, striding to the door, held it open for his visitor.

Georges knew, now, what his former victims had suffered, when they heard a similar condemnation pronounced against them, even though it was not followed by advice as to their future reading. André’s misfortune had seriously upset him, but mainly because Lucien and himself might be caught up in it.

He had certainly not worried over-much about the principal party’s feelings; nor, in the second case, had he worried over the sufferings of Maurice and Father de Trennes. And now, here he was in the same boat as them. He was, as it were, the Robespierre of St Claude’s: he had begun by having his rival executed, then his accomplices; now his own execution was upon him.

He went up to the deserted dormitory and flung himself down on his bed. There was nothing to distract him from his thoughts: the college was silent. And the last minutes of liberty allowed him before coming under constraint served only to reveal to him the full measure of his own disaster.

Father Lauzon had said nothing of the fate he was reserving for Alexander. Confronted with a choice, he had not, for one moment, hesitated. As Lucien had foreseen, he was keeping his special protege—keeping him so that he might reconcile him with God. He had succeeded in separating the two friends completely and finally. He might believe that the sun shone on Saturdays in honour of the Holy Virgin; that had not prevented him seeing, as clearly as Father de Trennes, through all their contrivances. The *Académie des Palinods* laureate had put a decisive end to a wonderful poem—the friendship of Georges and Alexander. His energy and authority could, it now seemed clear, be given expression in a manner other than by beginning every paragraph in his letters with an “I”. This priest with the candid eyes, this benign confessor, had reacted like a man, a man who realises that he is being fooled by two children; and like a priest indeed—a priest who sees himself mocked by the impious.

The holidays, which had been so rich in promise, would be lonely. And at the beginning of next term Alexander would not find Georges in this dormitory, where he was to have found him. What did all the rest matter to Georges—his expulsion from the Congregation, the loss of a prize, the need to think of a reason to give his parents for not returning to St Claude’s? It was as if everything had ceased to exist. The want of a little luck had ruined the greatest happiness in the world.

Georges felt himself overcome by despair, and his eyes filled with tears. They were not false tears: this was the moment of truth. He had wept when his friendship was threatened by Father de Trennes: he might well weep now that it was wiped out. He was alone, yet stifled his sobs as if the dormitory had been full of people; it was thus that Lucien had wept, and Maurice. He took out his handkerchief, then cast it from him, exasperated by the scent of lavender.

Twenty minutes before study was due to end, he made up his mind to go down. Lucien caught his eye as soon as he entered the room, and his friend's glance did him good. He noticed that the Supervisor smiled at him kindly. The abbe was no doubt thinking of this model pupil's voluntary mortifications, of his self-imposed prohibition from quitting the room henceforth, all in order to deprive himself of the innocent pleasure of smoking. Georges was comforted by that smile: somebody, at least, was still his dupe.

Lucien passed him his prep, so that Georges could save time by copying. It was the first time that the top boy of the form found himself obliged to copy someone else's Latin translation. But since he had been called out at the beginning of study, he would never have had the time to translate the exercise in the quarter of an hour which remained. He wrote fast, changing a word here and there. Lucien had, for once, been able to manage without his help: the passage of the *Aeneid* from which the exercise was taken appeared in a pencilled translation between the lines of a book which André had given him. On the evening when Georges was planning André's downfall, he had copied Lucien's maths prep. Now that he had paid for that baseness, he might surely be allowed to copy, even from André himself.

The bell rang before he had done the scansions which completed the exercise. The

papers were being collected. At the top of his work Georges wrote: "I was kept out of study by my director of conscience, and did not have time to do the scansions."

Lucien was outraged by what Georges had to tell him in the dormitory. He would not admit that one could possibly allow oneself to be expelled by a mere Father Lauzon. The thing to do was to go and denounce himself to the Superior and see what happened. In any case, only the Superior could take such a decision. And who knew what he might say if Georges were to ask after Father de Trennes? He might very well find it expedient to be more reasonable in the matter of Father Lauzon. The time had come to invoke Father de Trennes' frequently proffered patronage: it might be more efficacious in his absence than in his presence.

"It's a pity," Lucien said, "that Father de Trennes wasn't here last October. Had he been, I can promise you that André would still have been here. A master with overmuch taste for the Greeks is a special providence for a college, at least, for the boys. You have only to be in the know for his colleagues to be powerless to take any action against you. Maurice's case proves as much. André told me of a case in point, but I forget where it happened.

"The main thing is not to be discouraged by a setback and not to let yourself be intimidated by threats. One should never give in. Remember what it said in the Herodotus we were doing the other day? 'It is only by trying again and again, that we succeed.' Like when you persisted in making friends with Alexander—or André with me—will-power. And once you've got a real friend, you can face anybody and anything. You may be expelled. You may have to wait a year or more before meeting again—but you can bear it. André sent me a poem about it, in the Easter holidays."

Georges was grateful to Lucien for refusing to recognise the facts, but his own mind was made up. The fears which he had experienced yesterday evening had been justified. Alexander's smile, in the refectory, had been as radiant as ever, but Georges' heart had been heavy as he managed an answering smile: he was certain that all was over between them.

If he considered himself more perspicacious than Alexander, he also considered himself more intelligent than Lucien. Lucien's friendly advice was not equal in merit to Father Lauzon's advice concerning his future reading: reasons for optimism were certainly less numerous than reasons for being humble. In the first place Georges was in no position to make use of the matter of Father de Trennes with the Superior. How, having done his best to exculpate the former Supervisor of Studies, could he now turn round and bear witness against him? What mercy could he expect after the exposure of all his contradictions, dark doings, and equivocations? No, blackmail was not the thing to set him up again.

Moreover, Georges could see no valid comparison between his situation in relation to Alexander, and Lucien's in relation to André. Outside the college, Lucien and André were perfectly free to meet, since their families were acquainted and they had already had one school year and one long vacation together. Besides, André's expulsion had not resulted from any known connection between them.

Whereas Georges and Alexander were compromised in relation to each other. Parted, they would have no intermediary. Despite his boasting, Maurice would be in Father Lauzon's hands. Since his ambiguous nocturne with Father de Trennes he must surely have become suspect, whatever he might have said. His letters were watched and read as closely as his brother's. The measures which had been outlined to Georges showed that nothing was

being left to chance. Georges had at last met his match.

“July 1st. Feast of the Most Precious Blood of Our Lord Jesus Christ. Liturgical ornaments, red.” For Georges, likewise a most precious blood had flowed, flowed into his own veins, and he had given of his own blood in exchange. And nothing remained to him but the memory of this mystical union, as of the Procession of the Sacred Heart in which he had already recalled it, and of the Confraternity of the Precious Blood, to which Lucien had once recruited him.

Below, he read, “And the blood of the Lamb shall serve you as a sign.” And other memories crowded into his mind: that prayer, which involved the blood of the Lamb, which Father de Trennes had recited when putting on the vestments; the print in Father Lauzon’s room; the Christmas lamb.

In the gallery above Alexander and facing Georges the corrector of their errors was in prayer. He had finished his mass earlier than usual: no doubt he was waiting to see whether his ex-penitent would dare approach the communion table. Georges did not move. Alexander must have received similar orders, for he, too, kept his place. Was he again thinking of writing to the Pope in protest? But, as he had said, all this did not count, for him.

During the last study period Georges, as always on Saturdays, went to confession. He had suddenly made up his mind to try his luck, to tempt God. He would boldly exploit the idea which Lucien had suggested to him immediately after the hut incident. Lucien had, in like circumstances, suddenly seen the light at 10.35 pm on October 6th; Georges would do

likewise at 3.30 pm on June 29th. Had not even Alexander, one day during the Easter holidays, informed Father Lauzon that he had suddenly been enlightened by Grace? Every dog has his day: it was Georges' turn to experience purgation and illumination. If he was not in a state of grace, it was high time to do something about it. The Palinods academician should hear Georges sing a palinode. He would set foot on ground now forbidden him to cross swords, once again, with the priest. The friendship which he had fostered with Alexander by means of holy communions should depend irrevocably upon the confessional: let the sacraments once again come to their aid.

Kneeling in the confessional, Georges was deeply anxious. He said, in a voice of intense feeling, "Father, I implore you to hear me." His contrite bearing showed that this was not a case of bravado. He declared that he wanted to make up for the deliberate omissions in his past confessions.

He began by admitting to sins which he had not confessed to since his first confession at St Claude's. Then, piling it on, he depicted himself as the most corrupt creature imaginable. Misfortune, however, had revealed him to himself in all his shamefulness—that shame in which, he insisted, he had never involved anyone else. He was using the same tone which André had used with the Superior. What, he said, he had wanted of friendship was, indeed, that it should not enhance, but make him forget, his abject sin; he had wanted it to give him purity and light. The remorse which he showed for the imaginary sins, concerning which he spread himself thoroughly, proved that, henceforth, he was incapable of lying.

The confession which, in fact, he was now making to Father Lauzon was the one which Father de Trennes had expected of him. The only way in which he could pass himself off as

sincere was by confessing himself to be guilty. The act he was putting on was certainly undignified, unworthy; he could not help that, it was the priest, not himself, who had made it necessary. But he did not regret it. He experienced a cynical pleasure in forcing this man to listen to him, in trying to move him in his priestly soul, in filling him with a pity which was by no means deserved. He felt his heart lightened of a burden by this new fraud, as if he had, indeed, been a real penitent. He felt that already he was on his way back, up the steep slope to the very bottom of which he had been hurled. He took pleasure in debasing, soiling himself, in order to save his pure friendship. He stooped to conquer, to raise himself up: his precept was evangelical. And his pride, which he seemed to be humbling, had never been more arrogantly triumphant.

He expected a spate of advice in detail, and of exhortations full of pathos. But the Father confined himself to saying, slowly, "As penitence, you will meditate for a quarter of an hour on these words—I believe in eternal life."

Then he made the sign of absolution.

The next day, in religious instruction, the master gave out the subject for composition: "The Earthly Paradise." He would soon see, he said, smiling, whether the form remembered his opening lessons. He appeared to be thinking that he had played a fine trick on them. He was clearly uncommonly pleased with himself, sitting there rubbing his hands. But then, everyone else was smiling, for at least nobody had forgotten the matter of the large-fruited banana-tree.

Georges was furious at being disqualified from doing his best with such a fine subject,

and one which he knew really well, quite apart from the banana-tree. What an impertinence, this making him play the dunce! It was a punishment disproportionate to the crime. If he was unworthy to remain at St Claude's, then let him be expelled; if not, then let him be given his due in the matter of his school-work. He remembered what Alexander had said one day—"These men, whom we pay . . . He was paying to be taught and to be rewarded for good work, whether his success was due to his memory, his irony, or to St Expedit. His confessor was taking a hand in business which did not concern him—an abuse of his proper function. Did he think they were still living in the days of Father La Chaise and Father Daubenton, who governed their respective kings? The boys in the Philosophy First were perfectly right to side with Father de Trennes. It was really excessive to claim to be doing everything in God's name. There was a great deal to be said for the ancient Jewish custom of prohibiting the use of Jehovah's name outside the Temple.

With his head resting in his hand Georges stared at the blank sheet of paper. He had been driven out of the earthly paradise he had made his own. Pictures of the Biblical garden became confused with memories of a gardener's hut. The master must be surprised to see him sitting there, immobile, the only one who was not writing. The boy who had been second to him the last time must be rejoicing.

On an impulse of revolt Georges resolved to write an excellent composition in spite of the undertaking which had been required of him. He would be first in this, the last of the year, as he had been first in the first. He would win the bet he had made with Lucien and would defy Father Lauzon to do his worst: he would either win the prize for religious instruction, or he would win none. At the top of his paper he wrote two lines from Anatole

France, but leaving them as an anonymous epigram.

*Heureux qui, comme Adam entre les quatres fleuves,  
Sut nommer par leur nom les choses qu'il put voir!*

That done, he stopped writing and again stopped to think. He must, before going on, be clear in his mind about what he was doing—fighting for a prize, or for Alexander? The victory which he hoped to win would last but a day and would compromise their whole future. He would be throwing away the advantage which he had gained by his false confession. That morning his bearing in chapel had been exemplary and he had taken communion without shocking a soul. But a feigned humility could not help him now, when he had to express himself in black and white; yet that, perhaps, might be the price of final pardon. Besides, was he not, in some measure, very subtly avenged in obeying so contemptible an order? Accused of falsehood, yet he was ordered to commit a falsification.

Well, since he was condemned to write indifferently, he would exceed all bounds, go far beyond what was expected of him. Joyfully, cunningly and savagely, he would set about turning paradise upside down and inside out, and, like Garo, he would re-do God's work.

He left in the quotation and under it wrote, "Le Franc de Pompignan"—let the author of *Poésies Sacrées* do duty for the author of *Poètries Dorés*. As to the rivers, it occurred to him that he might at least mention the Tigris and Euphrates; they occurred in Alexander the Great's history, as well as being part of earthly paradise geography. But that suggested the

idea of taking the “quatre fleuves”—all four—from Alexander’s history. He recalled that there were some exegetists who identified the two other rivers as Nile and Ganges. He would take the same liberty with all four: he chose the Granicus, Hydaspes, Oxus and Indus. The master, struck by this, would be forced to think of Alexander, to have in mind the illustrious and enchanting name which was the key to this whole farce.

Next, Georges made the earthly paradise the land of gold, incense and myrrh, and not the land of “gold, carbuncle and onyx”. He placed it in the Occident, not the Orient. Concerning the various views as to location of paradise, he quoted the Gobi desert instead of the Pamir plateau, Japan instead of China, Madagascar instead of Ceylon, Abyssinia instead of Mesopotamia, and Mexico instead of Peru. He had not forgotten that one German astronomer had opted for the North Pole, but Georges changed it to the South Pole. He attributed the Pauline text, which inspired the Father of the Church to regard the earthly paradise as an allegory only, to St Peter. And finally made Philippe-Égalité author of that memoir on the whole subject, which was actually written by his learned grandfather. In short, although he left nothing out, he put it all in upside-down.

There still remained the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Idly, in his rough notebook, Georges wrote: *Musa paradisiaca*, under it an elaborate flourish, and under that the name of all the trees which he knew whose names were more or less peculiar, such as breadfruit-tree, butter-tree, wax-tree, lace-tree, cabbage-palm, sassafras and finally coconut-palm—which, after all, was certainly a large-fruited tree, although the rind of the fruit might have been rather too much for Adam’s teeth. Georges drew a coconut-tree with a snake twined round the trunk. He would have liked to make that the tree of seduction, but

decided that the pleasantries would be rather too bold. In the end, he never mentioned the tree at all; that he decided, would be even better.

He was now sure of being marked zero; he was delighted, in advance, with this result, almost as delighted as if he were certain of having the highest possible mark. He was sorry that the marks for this composition would not be announced. He would have taken pleasure in hearing himself allotted the lowest place in the form, in ending the year by a spectacular failure. He would have liked to hear his essay read aloud to the class; it would have amused the gallery.

He was, however, less anxious that Father Lauzon should read the composition; he might consider that there was rather too little of nature in such a collection of gross errors. Well, he thought, let what is to be, be. In any case it was unlikely that the Father would ask to see his paper; he would be satisfied upon hearing that it was a failure; unlikely, too, that if he read it, he would detect the strong salty flavour. He did not know the whole story of Georges and Alexander. The allusions to Alexander the Great would tell him nothing about the other Alexander. He would cross the Granicus dry-shod.

During break Georges told his cronies that he had deliberately written a ridiculous paper because the idea of winning a prize for religious instruction disgusted him. That sort of thing was all very well for a future seminarist; his former *lycée* friends would certainly make fun of him if he returned home crowned with such absurd laurels—not so much a crown as a tonsure. Besides, he would have enough prizes without that one. He became an object of admiration. Even Lucien was full of admiration.

“It adds to your importance in other people’s eyes,” he said. “Like your being forbidden

to leave study edifying the Supervisor. It looks as if you and Father Lauzon must have the same horoscopic signs in the House of Friends.”

“But not, unfortunately, in the hut of friends! However, since I have been no longer anathema, and denied communion, I’m beginning to think you may not have been so far out! I can’t think why Alexander hasn’t followed my example. He’s still not taking communion, which can only mean he refuses to go to confession. He’s probably as unwilling as ever to accuse himself of sins he hasn’t committed. If he were not quite so scrupulous, the whole business might have blown over by now. But, who knows? His resistance makes our case more interesting. In our parable there are two prodigal sons, and up to now only one has returned.”

That evening was the Academy’s last session of the year, since the following Sunday, being the day before the holidays, there was a short Retreat, preached by the Superior. Philosophy and Rhetoric First boys were taking the baccalaureate, assisted by the prayers of the whole community. Thanks to their absence Georges was able to secure the honour of a padded armchair. The Superior announced that he had kept a surprise in store for them: to wit, some verses by Bossuet on the subject of holy communion; for Bossuet, like himself, thanks be to God, had been a poet. He was thinking of quoting some extracts from the poem in a report he was writing for the International Euchar-istic Congress, which was to be held during the holidays. He took the opportunity to urge the academicians to be even more scrupulous in their eucharistic observances until the new school year.

The words “holidays” and “new school year” made a singular impression on Georges. He did not yet know what they would mean to him. He wanted to believe that Father Lauzon,

moved by his repentance, might also have a surprise in store for him. It would be a pity to be saying good-bye to St Claude's now that, at last, he was comfortably seated there. He remembered at least one of Bossuet's stanzas because he was wondering whether it would figure in the Superior's report:

*De son chaste baiser, mes lèvres enflammées,  
D'un beau feu consumées,  
Portent rapidement dans mon cœur entamé  
Le trait du Bien-Aimé . . .*

It was, to say the least of it, a surprise to find the *Bien-Aimé* again, in the midst of this bathos.

When Father Lauzon came to fetch his Congregationists, he made Georges a sign to accompany them. Georges was positively transported. He entirely forgot his fears. But when they reached the chapel a quick glance round showed him that Alexander was not there.

Father Lauzon expounded the duties of a Congregationist during the holidays. Duties, nothing but duties, for Congregationists as well as academicians. Georges stared hard at the priest who, however, seemed to be avoiding his eyes. Despite the *de facto* remission which he had received, he loathed this man. Even if the two friends did manage both to return to St Claude's in the new term, what difficulties, in view of Father Lauzon's recent severity, they must expect to face! The priest was the only obstacle between them and a life of endless delights. Georges wished that the earth would open and swallow the man: such a miracle

would certainly have served a more useful purpose than that which he had envisaged when Father de Trennes was celebrating mass. Alexander and himself would be free. The priest would have carried their secret with him. And everything would have been for the best; *he* would go to his celestial paradise and leave *them* to their earthly one. But no; there he was, very much alive, firm on his feet, an angel in a badly draped surplice with a handkerchief in his hand instead of a flaming sword. Georges looked at him and decided that his face was vulgar, his voice capucinal, the very simplicity of his gestures factitious. In eloquence, he shone only in private conversation; in public it was the eloquence of Calino, of a Palinod indeed. Father de Trennes had a more convincing, sustained manner; and a more honourable countenance.

The next day, during evening study, Georges was summoned to Father Lauzon's room. The priest said:

"The other day I was extremely hard on you: in the first place, you deserved it; secondly, it was necessary to put you on trial. Your confession was a terrible blow to your pride, but at the same time, of what a burden is your soul now relieved! And it proved to me, only too thoroughly, that the gravity of my reproaches was very far from being excessive. But at least, by forcing you to recognise this, I have had the happiness of amending your conduct.

"I have been much edified by the zeal with which you have resumed your religious observances despite your expulsion. I could not have confidence in you until the day when, having nothing further to hope for from contrivance, you would have no reason to lie to me. If the evil had been beyond amendment, you would, in dropping the mask of hypocrisy, have revealed the countenance of a flaunting impiety. But it was God's will that, in this first storm

of the passions, you were not to be among those who perish.”

“I owe that to you, also, Father,” Georges said.

“Because, in spite of appearances, it seemed to me impossible that a soul like yours could be altogether perverted, and that there was more thoughtlessness than wickedness in your behaviour. Whatever they may say, faith is largely a matter of intelligence; therefore you could not have lost it. If I pretended to despair of you, it was precisely because I still had some hope. You see, I know you better, perhaps, than you know yourself.”

Georges thought this a propitious moment to announce that he had, although not without a struggle, obeyed the order to fail in his religious instruction composition.

“What you suffered in so doing,” said the Father, “will be the only punishment you have to remember. Since you have so completely returned to a better frame of mind, I consider that the differences between us are all settled. I can, therefore, cancel the decision I had come to concerning your return to St Claude’s. But we will, if you please, not cancel, during the remaining week of term, the orders which I gave M. le Surveillant: let that be the justification of the reasons alleged for those orders. In short, it rests solely with you to be top of the second, as you have been top of the third form.”

Georges thanked him. He was almost intoxicated with joy. And it was, this time, better founded than the relief which had possessed him when he had realised his rehabilitation as a Congregationist. He now knew that he could return to St Claude’s; he had never doubted that Alexander would do so. Alexander, he supposed, must have capitulated some time that day, thus making it possible for a general peace to be concluded. All he wanted to know now were the conditions.

“I have something else to say to you,” the Father resumed. “The boy who followed you into error has not followed you in repentance. I commend him to your most fervent prayers; he already has mine. I am most deeply distressed at the idea that the boy will be leaving this college, never to return, so different, alas! to what he was when he came to us!”

Georges was stricken to the heart; nevertheless he managed to keep his head by an effort of will, and to ask:

“Father, ought I not to blame myself, seeing that my younger friend is being expelled for the same fault which is being forgiven me?”

“I am not unmoved by your scruples, but let them not conceal any regrets whatsoever! You have, indeed, no reason to regret the loss of such a young friend. The resistance which he is opposing to the work of his own salvation might well put your own in grave danger. That is why I cannot hesitate to sacrifice him. Friendship between you two is no longer possible. It was already too warm and called for the greatest precautions. The circumstances in which you fostered it have warped its nature, for ever. Leave its broken remnants at the bottom of that abyss which you yourself have escaped.”

The Father rose, apparently to signify that the interview was over, but Georges remained in his chair, mute, stricken. Was it in order to demonstrate that Georges’ grief was excused, or by way of purification, that Father Lauzon stooped and kissed him on the top of his head? It was a kiss of peace and forgiveness, worthy indeed of the man who had likewise closed the affair of

Alexander’s note: this final closure was thus also sealed with a holy kiss.

At dinner Georges found a message from the boy in his drawer. He was impatient to be in bed, so that he could read it by the light of his torch. It would be the first time that term that he had had to do so. At last, hidden by the bed-clothes, he read these lines:

*Georges,*

*It's like in the Easter holidays: I swore Vd write to you, and I'm doing it. But it's not easy. We're so closely watched!*

*One way or the other, we've got to hold out to the end. You have again bent to the storm, like the reed—which I admire you for, / could never have managed it myself—but you can be quite sure that I shall stand up to it better than the oak. Lauzon thinks he can break me by telling me that I shall not return to St Claude's, because of something that happened to Maurice—probably the thing you referred to—and he's also taken my part as a page in the play away from me. We'll soon be putting on our own play for his benefit, and he'll be rid of us. He knows a great deal—for at last I can openly defy him, but he doesn't know that we have sworn never to part. The time has come when he must know that, too. Since they've made up their minds to separate us, we must join together for always by running away. For always! Isn't that splendid! For always, and far away from all these people. For always united by our blood. For always.*

*Alexander.*

*PS. It will be easier for us to run away from home than from here.*

Georges was overwhelmed. No question of doubting his good fortune now. He kissed the note more fervently even than he had kissed the first he had ever received, under cover of his Virgil. And he emerged from cover.

He was sorry to find that Lucien was asleep: the Supervisor having lingered at their end of the room, good old Lucien had let his drowsiness overcome him. Georges would have liked to tell him the good news. It was, indeed, the Good News, the tidings of great joy of his reanimated religion. He who was, once again, his saviour, had given him the liberating words: you must leave all to follow me. It was the very precept which Georges had read aloud at the lectern in the refectory: he was to suffer whatever was required of him in order to please the *Bien-Aimé*, the well-beloved. And had not Lucien also said that, if you had a real friend, you could face anything?

True, he had not even dreamed of running away since the day when, because of André, he had had the idea of doing so; even then he had intended to go home, whereas now he was required to run away from home. He recognised that the business had become very serious. But was not this the only course which they were leaving open to him, as to Alexander?

Alexander's message relieved him of a burden, as his confession was said to have done; but how differently! He was no longer alone in face of an unknown prospect. The future was a smiling one, since it would be shared with Alexander. Warmly, he embraced his friend's point of view. Material difficulties seemed to him of secondary importance. By taking the initiative Alexander was summoning luck back to their side. His decision wiped out Father Lauzon's. The man who had once claimed to understand Alexander and was now claiming to understand Georges, would receive the reward he deserved for so much perspicacity.

Or, rather, it was his duplicity which deserved that particular reward; his speeches involved too many ulterior meanings. He implied too many mental reservations, and, taken all in all, he was not really one whit more candid than the Superior. Had he, for example, been honest when, after having asked Georges not to return to St Claude's, he had then changed his mind and appeared to be sacrificing Alexander's return to the school instead? He knew perfectly well that Alexander would not be returning, since his brother was being discreetly expelled. And, in order to prevent the two friends from coming together in some other college, he was trying to keep Georges at St Claude's. If one of the rebels had not given in, he would have devised some other method of parting them. He pursued his ends as methodically as Father de Trennes had pursued his. Jealous spite accounted for quite as much of his behaviour as zeal. Forced to lose the company of a boy who was dear to him, he aimed to ensure himself a companion in misfortune. Alexander had been right when he had said that Father Lauzon was jealous. André would have had another occasion to refer to the fox which had its tail cut off.

The sanction against Maurice was a source of surprise. Georges saw in it a manifestation of the clever but ruthless principles which directed the college. Father de Trennes' accomplice had been spared only provisionally, to minimise the scandal, and to purchase his silence. And, in fact, it was probable that he had told nobody the whole truth. But he had to go for all that, albeit belatedly. The systems of expulsion in operation were many and diverse, indeed! What a pleasure their riposte to this kind of thing was going to be!

Georges' enthusiasm had by no means diminished the next day and he waited only until

first break to try to get Lucien to share it. He looked, as he talked, through a screen of branches, at Father Lauzon's window: what would the illustrious director of his conscience think of the elopement? If he were logical it would kill him. Lucien listened to him in silence and then, with a serious expression, said:

“Have you, by any chance, gone potty? When will you learn not to allow your acts to be dictated by the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost? If the kid had asked you to join him in hanging yourselves, I suppose you'd have said yes? You're making me positively like old Lauzon—he's not far out when he says he understands you, and I'm not surprised that he's worried. In future I shall consider him as one of the Fathers of the Church, and a scourge of heresy.” And he went on, on a less serious note, “Besides, all you've just told me is the kind of thing you imagine but never do. Also, there are things you're meant for, and things you're not meant for. I learnt that from my ‘conversion’.

“All right, suppose you succeed in running away—I mean, suppose you do it and aren't caught and hauled back by the police the next day. What's going to happen to you when you run out of money, and haven't any red ties and gold neck-chains left to sell? I suppose you'll say you can get a job on a farm, or push a barrel-organ round singing,

*Nous sommes les deux gosses  
Qui s'aimeront toujours.*

“Look, Georges, up to now you've been cultivating a nice style in nobility. But watch out, you're rapidly declining into melodrama.”

The whole college seemed bent on backing up Lucien's way of looking at it. Never had the school been so high-spirited. But Georges reacted by sticking firmly to his resolve. It seemed to him that he and Alexander were already together, for always, just as the song, and the boy himself, had said. He was not going to sacrifice Alexander to cold reasoning or to witticisms. To Georges, Lucien seemed cloddish, earthy, shockingly middle-class. Alexander had reacted nobly to their situation. Georges was not the boy to disappoint him. But to Lucien he said, "You're right. I'll write him a soothing note."

When a master was pleased with the year's work, he abandoned lessons during the last period in favour of reading aloud from a book chosen for pleasure. That Wednesday the third had their last history period.

The boys questioned the Father about the religious instruction composition, but he said he could not do everything at once, and had as yet only read a few of the papers, which seemed quite satisfactory. He would say more about them on Sunday, but even so not very much, since these essays were one of the secret compositions. Meanwhile, for the time being, they had only to think of amusing themselves.

"I have chosen," he said, "a text which might have the effect of inspiring you to prefer wholesome pastimes during your holidays. It is a *Study of the Behaviour of Lizards* by M. de Quatrefages."

That name, coupled with the *mores* of lizards, and one which Georges knew to be closely associated with the equally interesting manners and morals of silkworms, was greeted with joyous anticipation. This was going to be something like the business of the

banana-tree. Lizards were an attribute of the earthly paradise.

Georges, however, asked whether *An Instance of Cunning in the Mole* would not be more interesting. In his quality as an academician he owed it to himself to put in a word for a work which he had sought in vain in the study library and which was one of the glories of the college. But the Father replied that the case of cunning in question involved mysteries of nature which could not be dealt with there.

M. de Quatrefages, then, carried the day. A mildly sardonic smile lit the old Father's face. He put on his spectacles, which hung from his ear by a gold chain. But instead of beginning to read, he bent his head backwards, enjoying this imposition of a last delay. He was imagining scenes other than the class-room before him: he was already away on his own holidays, out in the fields, his white mouse in a cage—it was thus that he carried it about with him. In both hands he took up the large and richly bound volume on his desk and raised it as proudly as the Bishop of Pergamum raising his mitre to his head. At last, however, he put down the book, sought the page he wanted, and began, in total silence, to read:

“The old naturalists, misled by the changes in colour which age causes lizards to undergo, multiplied far beyond the true figure the number of native species of that genus of reptiles.” After this beginning the Father stopped and looked at his audience, as if to judge its effect; then he resumed his reading, stopping to comment from time to time. The form learnt that in fact only the following species of lizard were to be found in France—*ocellata*, *viridis*, *velox*, *muralis* and *stirpium*.

M. de Quatrefages' observations had chiefly related to an individual of the green

species, *viridis*, which he had had in his possession for eight months. During the daytime he kept it under his shirt; at night, he wrapped it in cotton-wool. He had written: “My *viridis* was particularly fond of honey, jam and milk, but would leave these and all else for a fly. He had a taste for music. When I entered a room where a musical instrument was being played, he would at once become excited and hasten to poke his pretty head out above my cravat. If I placed him on the ground he would make his way towards the point from which the sound emanated. The flute and the flageolet, in particular, seemed to give him pleasure. The rattle of the cymbals, the tinkling of the *chapeau chinois* caused him to start, whereas he remained insensible to the noise of the big drum . . .”

The hopes of the form were fulfilled. It was easy not to worry about the details which the Father explained that he was, in some cases, discreetly omitting, as if the subject were moles. M. de Quatrefages’ *viridis* popped back into its hiding-place; laughter, held in check up to this point, burst out at last. For a whole year the third had made an effort never to laugh during religious instruction. But after all this was also the history class-room, and it was surely permissible to laugh at the *mores* of lizards, especially on the eve of the holidays. The good Father seemed to understand this, and as soon as the laughter had subsided, he went placidly on with his reading. But every time the word *viridis* turned up, he glanced at the class over his spectacles and paused for a moment by way of warning. There was a feeling that their want of sobriety in being introduced to a wholesome pastime grieved him.

The free study period on Thursday morning was devoted to a rehearsal of *Les Plaideurs*. Georges calculated that this should provide him with an opportunity to convey a note into

Alexander's drawer. He had told Lucien that he was going to write the boy a soothing note: this is what he actually wrote:

*Alexander,*

*I love you more than ever. Your courage has restored my own. I am giving up everything for you, as you are for me. As soon as the holidays begin, you will fix the time and place of our meeting, for our departure. We shall have lost a few days, but gained a whole lifetime.*

*Georges.*

By this note he consecrated his own impulsive adoption of the boy's idea, and strengthened Alexander in his adherence to it. But, once he had put down his pen, he began to wonder whether all these fine projects would not remain chimerical. A few minutes' thought had forced him to recognise that Lucien's judgment of them had not been far wrong. Nevertheless, his imagination was too pleasantly engaged with them to enable him to put them aside. Like some younger son of his house in the past, he would be setting out into the world in search of adventure, accompanied by one who had called himself his page. Moreover, he was flattered in his pride at the idea of having inspired such a passionate, all-excluding friendship in a being so beautiful as Alexander. Would he ever again have such a chance to show that, in the worship of beauty, he yielded nothing to the Greeks?

Taking advantage of an interval, he slipped out of the rehearsal—Father Lauzon was not supervising the execution of his orders in person. By good luck there were no servants in the

refectory. As he put the note under Alexander's napkin-ring, he thought of the other things he had put into this same drawer: a flask of lavender-water, a handful of cherries, two notes. Of such simple things only had their friendship been made, yet they had been treated as crimes; and it was that which was forcing them, like criminals, to put themselves outside the pale of society.

During the afternoon swim Georges went, alone, to the same place as on the first occasion. He climbed out of the river and lay down to sun himself. There were small pebbles at the roots of the grass, which dug into his skin, but he did not find the sensation unpleasant. It was a mixture of sharp and sweet, rather like the memories which he would be taking away from college.

This was his last outing, since on the following Sunday this part of the day would be given up to the dress rehearsal. He conjured up a vision of Alexander in his blue bathing-trunks. Where would they next go swimming together? In what seas, what rivers? The rivers of the earthly paradise, and the seas of the Macedonian's empire; the seas and rivers of the Map of Love—no, all that would remain behind, in books and papers, at college. Georges raised his arms, as if to call down the blessing of the sun upon his body, and Alexander's, as he evoked it. Then he lowered them, hieratically, and rested his hands upon his shoulders. He remained in that attitude for several minutes, his eyes closed, offering himself to the future.

The whistle blew: it was to mark the end of aquatic sports and sylvan reveries alike. Georges stared long at the far bank. On his way back to the others he deliberately stepped upon such gladioli as came his way. No flower must bloom in this place next year.

Saturday. “Old Boys’ Day. Mass in memory of deceased members of the Old Boys’ Association.” But the bald bishop had not paid them another visit: he had done quite enough. It was the Superior who delivered the sermon for the occasion: *Ecce quam bonum . . .* how good it is . . . *et quam jucundum . . .* and how pleasant . . . *habitare fratres in unum!* . . . to be together with one’s brothers! Could it be in memory of Father de Trennes that he thus quoted—but surely in its most praiseworthy sense—this maxim of the Knights Templar?

This pious assembly, said the orator, presented a comforting spectacle in the midst of the feverish excitement of the age: it marked that which endures, by contrast with that which passes away. He went on to pronounce a panegyric on old boys who had died—the transition was a trifle too sudden—but was soon back at the happiness of those who were present.

“You recall,” he said, “the place in chapel where you prayed, where you collected your thoughts after your frequent holy communions. You remember the .place in study where, under the watchful eye of Supervisors you sometimes thought severe, you passed so many fecund hours. You recall the playground, where your exuberance or your want of it were directed into harmonious games. You remember your open, candid friendships, first impulses of youthful and generous hearts. And finally you recall your visits to your masters and to your directors of conscience, fathers of your young souls and minds, who, gently and firmly, enlightened your virtues and your labours.”

“An awful lot of ‘yours’,” Lucien muttered.

Georges was thinking of his own year at the college, conning over what chapel, study,

games, his director of conscience, and his supervisors, had meant in his case. Neither he nor Alexander would be returning one day as old boys, any more than Father de Trennes would ever pay a visit as a former Supervisor of

Studies. But for Georges, too, it had been good and pleasant to be together with his brother: and it was because they were trying to prevent him from doing so that he, like that brother, was going away from St Claude's.

He looked upon the men who were gathered there in the nave. Were each and all of them thinking that the Superior was right? At least, even if their friendships had not been open and candid, they must have turned out well, or they would not be there. And some of them may have experienced the same joys as Georges himself, joys remote from all evil and inspired by beauty. Yet that day nothing could be read in their faces but a stupid contentment, sordid self-interest, oafish vanity, vain pride in their honours, and a contemptuous condescension towards the rising generation.

These men had, in fact, but one witness in their favour, and that they had probably forgotten: it was their school photograph framed and hung in the first-floor corridor. Georges recalled one, all prettiness and tousled hair, rising from a Byronic collar; another, so delicate and gentle; another again, all pertness; and the one whose air and expression suggested mystery. These boys no longer existed. Their faces had been replaced by men's faces, faces on which life, ugliness, standardised values, and the razor had left their mark. Georges began to understand, now, what Father de Trennes had meant about men's faces; and he felt himself in love with his own face, with the faces of his schoolfellows all about him, intact and pure. He loved them for not yet being the faces of men. He loved them as

reflections of Alexander's face.

At the next religious instruction period the Father announced that one of the papers handed in last Sunday had given him an unpleasant surprise.

"Yes, my sons," he said, "there is one among you in whom the proverb—to enter the conclave as Pope and leave it a Cardinal—will be accomplished."

He looked at Georges as he said this but confined himself to adding that he would take the matter up with the boy in question after the lesson.

There were requests that the essay be read aloud, hoping for something as diverting as M. de Quatrefages' lizards. Georges, who had originally wished for just that, was now grateful to the Father for saying that he was bound by secrecy in this case, just as, during his first term, he had been grateful to *le Tatou* for not giving the form a chance to laugh at his "Portrait of a Friend". But his reason then had been fear that Lucien might be recognised. On this occasion few of his form-mates would have appreciated his highly contrived subtleties, and, not having the key to the enigma, would have thought that he was simply jeering at everyone.

At the end of the lesson, the Father called Georges up to him. A number of other boys crowded round, but he dismissed them. He then asked Georges what on earth had possessed him when writing his composition.

"I wasn't in very good form that morning, Father."

"You must have been in very bad form, for your composition is a tissue of ineptitudes. You might almost have been doing it for a dare."

Georges was taken aback by this: it seemed that all the Fathers had their moments of penetration. He had thought of saying that he had deliberately written a bad paper as an act of self-mortification—mortification being the *pièce de resistance* at St Claude's. He imagined the good man softened by so much virtue as by the sight of a white mouse. But there was a certain danger in such a comic turn: so edifying a story would be bound to get back to the Superior, and to Father Lauzon, to whom its quality might not appeal. Self-mortification, like the coconut-palm and the medlar-tree, had better be foregone. The master said:

“You made a brilliant start with a quotation, though it was rather dragged in, but what followed made it ironical at your own expense. For you by no means ‘called things by their names’, as your poet puts it. Not only were there a number of inexplicable oversights but, by a very curious phenomenon, everything you wrote is a sort of transposition of the truth. You copied those monks in the Rule of whose Order we read that they must be dressed in black, and who wrote in the margin, ‘that is to say, in white’.”

“I don't know what to say, Father. I can't imagine how I did it.”

“Simply by having failed to revise the earlier lessons. I foresaw that I should catch someone out, but not that it would be you.

“I must not conceal from you that certain consequences are inevitable. You will have one fewer prizes. I am sorry for it, as is the director of your conscience, with whom I have discussed it. But he and I will have a word about it with M. le Supérieur, and maybe we can save a leaf of your laurels.

That afternoon was set aside for the dress rehearsal of *Les Plaideurs*. They all went to the linen-room for their costumes. The *Richard Cœur de Lion* players were just leaving it, filling the austere corridor with pages and warriors. Every page had a different costume, and Georges recognised the one which Alexander had described. He was glad to see that the boy who had taken his friend's place looked awkwardly bundled in his red doublet and white hose. The college was getting the page it deserved.

The Sisters were fitting and adjusting the costumes, and enjoying it with much discreet laughter at the actors' expense. In one corner the Prefect of Studies in person was stuffing Lucien's corsage to make him a bosom, while quoting from La Fontaine:

*Même encore un garçon fait la fille au collège.*

Beside him, the Comtesse de Pimbeche, corsage unfastened, awaited his turn.

When the rehearsal was over and they had resumed their ordinary clothes, Lucien began questioning the Prefect about la Champmesté. Georges seized the opportunity to pay a flying visit to Alexander's dormitory. He smiled at the idea that he had nearly done so in a brocaded coat, blond wig and red-heeled shoes.

There was nobody there. Georges approached the bed he knew to be the one. Fresh pictures were engraving themselves upon his memory. Bed, table, locker, carpet were like all the others, yet could not have been those of another boy. They were marked with a sign, as the two towels hung over the bed-rail were marked with a number. A pair of pink pyjamas were folded on the pillow; it was Georges' turn to have Father de Trennes' ideas about

pyjamas. He would have liked to take them away, but confined himself to touching them.

The actors had been invited to a tea-party in the refectory. When they rejoined the rest of the school, it was to learn that the two divisions had just been called together for the annual photograph of the whole school. The acting company had been forgotten; but, in any case, they were entitled to a special photograph on the day of the public performance. Thus, because of *Les Plaideurs*, Georges did not appear in the same photograph as Alexander. Father Lauzon would at least have that satisfaction, although it must deprive him of another—subsequently burning the pair of them in effigy.

Georges had not been into the junior school study since the brief gathering there in January. The end-of-the-school-year Retreat, which took him there that evening, was, for him, an end-of-studies Retreat.

As was customary, the junior boys sat in the front rows, but Alexander, who was at the end of the fourth row, by this arrangement sat at his own desk. It was there that he had written his first note to Georges, the one surrounded by garlands; and his last, the signal for their revolt and departure. From the dais facing them, where now the Superior was speaking of the cardinal virtues, Alexander had received the permissions which had enabled him to keep their rendezvous. He had, in his imagination, hung the walls of this room with portraits of Georges. And now, beyond the limits of this room, appeared the wide world; beyond the cardinal virtues, life itself.

Georges recalled the Retreat of the first day of the school year, which he had heard preached in this same room. At the time his only preoccupation was with Lucien; today he would sacrifice Lucien to a friend who required of him even greater sacrifices. The year's

first sermon, in which special friendships had been touched upon, had borne fruit in a singular fashion. And yet, would the preacher have had any right to complain of them? True, Alexander had set up, on that room's roll of honour, a name other than that of the Dominican's young martyrs. And Georges, no doubt, had followed a path which was not St Placidius'. And the Well-Beloved of their hearts had not been Him of the *Imitation*. But, progressing from Lucien to Alexander, the quality of Georges' friendship had improved. As he had told Father Lauzon, he had climbed upwards, towards purity and light. And neither Father Lauzon nor himself could claim any credit.

On the morrow forenoon there was "instruction in common", once again in junior school study. This was not like the instruction for the October Retreat, which was given to each division separately: the Superior was not ubiquitous. Would his subject now be the Theological virtues, the Civic virtues; would he be talking of *vertubleu* and *vertuchon*? [Euphemistic forms of *vertu Dieu*: c.f. oddsbodikins for *God's Body*.] Of Thrones, Virtues and Dominations? With a view to inspiring them, in his turn, with a taste for wholesome holiday distractions, he might also have talked of the "virtues of plants", though avoiding, of course, reference to the "virtues of simple(s)" for fear of causing confusion.

But it seemed that M. le Supérieur had talked sufficiently of virtues. He had kept in reserve for them a work of which the gentlemen of the Academy had heard already: his report to the Eucharistic Congress.

"I hope," he said, "that this report, for which you, yourselves, have furnished the matter, will make you want to persevere in your pious dispositions. Here, then, are the title and

exordium.

*Report on the regime of daily communion at the free College of St Claude's (France) during the scholastic year 19—/19—.*

*At a time when the assembled Catholic world is paying homage to Jesus-Eucharisty, an account of the workings of the regime of daily communion in a free College of France has been deemed not unworthy of interest, nor unworthy to persuade the governors of other educational establishments to adopt a principle so rich in graces of all kinds for the community.*

He paused and glanced round the room, as the history master had done after the first sentence concerning the *mores* of lizards. Was he expecting them to reflect upon the matter or the manner? Did he want to see whether his charges were struck by being thus offered as an example for the admiration of the whole Catholic world? Or whether, rather, they were judging their Superior worthy, in eloquence and length of breath, of the Eagle of Meaux? No longer reading, he resumed, in a more familiar manner:

“I have good cause, boys, to congratulate both myself and you. This year, at St Claude's, up to and including this morning, there have been 43,973 communions. That is something vastly more important—with all respect to our prize-winners—than tomorrow's vain laurels.”

He picked up his notes in order to give them some more figures.

“From October 4th to December 21st, the average of daily communions has been 175, with 198 boys present on 79 days. For the second term the average was 181—a record figure—with 193 boys present on 98 days. The third term—170 out of 192 boys present on 73 days. The diminution is apparent only, since it is explained by the fact that during these last few days, the most senior boys were absent—and their fervour is well known to you.”

He raised his head with an air of triumph. It was clear that he felt that much of the honour was his own, the honour implied by these statistics, and by the fact that he himself had administered most of the communions in question.

“I do not know,” he continued, “whether there are many scholastic establishments who can pride themselves—I dare employ that word!—on such a result. It means that an intense spiritual life has reigned in this house. The Congregation and the Fraternities have added new members to their numbers. Contributions to good works have increased. Conduct has, in general, been excellent, excepting for one or two backslidings quickly checked; and the virtue of one of your number was distinguished, under the cover of anonymity, by an act of meritorious zeal.”

Georges was sorry not to be able to acknowledge this tribute publicly, as in the case of his election to the Academy.

“A subtle allusion to Father de Trennes,” Lucien muttered. “And here have I been thinking his misadventure was due to angelic activity! All honour to sneaks!”

“You know perfectly well,” Georges answered, “that angels and devils are all the same.”

The Superior was still talking:

“Now, see the consequence in the manner in which those whose piety I have referred to have acquitted themselves in their examinations—I received the results today. Out of our fifteen candidates in the two parts of the baccalaureate, twelve have passed, among them one, your schoolfellow X, with the special mention ‘Very Good’. Be in no doubt about this—their success is in a great part due to the moral atmosphere generated by the permanent state of grace resulting from daily communion.

“I expect even finer harvests from these divine servings—the joy of seeing grow up, among you, numerous vocations. But there I am touching upon too delicate a point to allow myself to do more than half-open your conscience to such calls from on high.”

And, in a duller voice, the orator proceeded to a rather long commentary upon his preterition.

Georges, insensible to this persistent murmur, was dwelling upon the statistics, which Lucien had greeted by a pressure of the foot. Of the year which had started with André Ferron, and ended with Maurice and Father de Trennes, Georges and Alexander’s year, all that remained, officially, were some statistics of daily communions. However, the Superior had not altogether overlooked those personages, since he had glanced at certain “backslidings”. No doubt he considered them negligible, taking the number of people under consideration into account. Since only a couple had been caught, he concluded the remainder to be innocent, that innocence preserved by an act of zeal which he had made a point of praising. Or perhaps he believed in the general virtue because he wanted his communion statistics to be worth reckoning. Or, again, perhaps he was convinced that the use of the sacraments is itself a virtue sufficiently great to make up for all the rest. He admired it with

the same absolute trust as he did the apocryphal speeches and authentic poems of the Eagle of Meaux. Perhaps, finally, he was reassuring himself by reflecting that none of the misfortunes described by October's preacher had occurred: there had been no case of the Host bursting into flames and no case of sudden death, in a total of nearly 200 boys and 44,000 holy communions.

There had been other statistics in Georges' year: Lucien, at the beginning, counting up his medals, pictures and indulgences; the Bursar, talking of his kitchen accounts, on the day of the great outing; Father de Trennes having a reckoning made of certain absences from study, with a view to discovering Georges' secret without causing a scandal. And even Georges himself had subsequently imagined some statistics relating to that priest. It remained for him to produce some statistics of his own, concerned not with his communions and fraternity memberships, nor with his firsts and special mentions, but with his notes and assignations. And he was less exacting than Catullus in the matter of kisses.

Father Lauzon had listened to the Superior without all his usual attention. No doubt he was reflecting that, through his fault, Alexander's abstention from communion for more than ten days now had sensibly diminished the total of communions. On the other hand he was doubtless recalling the conversation which Georges and Alexander had had, in his presence, during March, in the course of which they had spoken of their own daily communions in a fashion which had touched him.



At bottom, the Superior was not so very far wrong. What he was proclaiming were undeniable facts, and he left everyone free to interpret them as he pleased. His method was rather like that of a certain eighteenth-century almanac compiler who, producing his own particular statistics relating to the number of houses in Paris, wrote that there were so many thousands “not counting the ones behind them”. The Superior was not interested in what happened “behind”. Not surprising: but for the glimpse which had been forced on him, what could he know about it? Every boy under his care was playing several parts: which was the true one? Some, who swaggered as libertines, were perhaps nothing of the kind. Others expiated their vices in cruel remorse and the fear, as Marc had said, of collapsing suddenly, of compromising both their health and their work. Not satisfied with the prayers said for them in the college, the very philosophers and rhetoricians who had scourged official obscurantism had doubtless, before facing their examiners, said a prayer for themselves. Had they not been told, in their religious instruction lessons, about those great leaders of the Freemasonry who sneak off to do their Easter duty in secret?

Yes, truly, it was very difficult to assess the value of an act, as difficult as to assess the value of an intention. Lucien’s indulgences were easier to manage: the intention was pointed out, one had only to conform to it, and there was no more to be said. But, at St Claude’s, how were you to orientate yourself among so many conflicting interests? The masters themselves made the task difficult, with their casuistry. Had not the Superior been playing with direction of intention, Father Lauzon with mental restriction, Father de Trennes with equivocation?

Moreover, the result of some acts had been the opposite of their intention. Georges, trying to seduce Lucien, had driven him to conversion. Alexander, seduced, had saved Georges' purity, and Maurice, by his impurity, had helped him.

All was at once true and false, all both yes and no, like Panurge's Carymary-Carymara. Everyone had a double who was not like him, everything implied a contradiction or concealed a mystery. According to the preacher, there were boys of light and boys of the shadows and it was very hard to distinguish them. The statue of Tarsicius, martyr of the Eucharist, had been presented by Lucien's parents at a time when he was contriving, with great skill, to combine daily communion and an affair with André. Beneath the base of that statue lay a note, addressed to the Superior, and torn into pieces, a note which bore Father de Trennes' name in Georges' hand-writing. Of Virgil's eclogues, Georges remembered the one concerning Alexis, Father Lauzon the one concerning the Holy Virgin. Father de Trennes the private orator was by no means Father de Trennes the sacred orator. And his suitcase contained not only a provision of chaplets, but also Georges' and Lucien's pyjamas.

But there had also been communions free from equivocation, prayers which were fervent, and acts of an incontestable purity. Georges had not taken communion during his first few days, because he had not been to confession. For a long time Lucien and Alexander had really given themselves to the services and to communion every day. Marc de Blajan had made up for André Ferron. Father de Trennes' monologues had been replaced by Father Lauzon's; and the latter's secret triumphs had surpassed the former's.

The same balance obtained in regard to their scholastic work: the rhetorician who had just passed his baccalaureat with the special mention "Very Good" was the one who had

said that he lived only for dancing. He must, no doubt, have worked even harder than he danced. And Georges himself, although thinking first only of Lucien, subsequently only of Alexander, had nevertheless been top of his form as often as he could manage it.

Thus evil, in the long run, was offset by good. The Eucharistic Congress might well be edified. The boys of St Claude's had deceived their Superior; he was not deceiving the Congress delegates. All would have received their reward.

After the midday break following luncheon the boys went in groups to fetch their trunks from the attic. Some of them blew the dust off so that it hung in the air, and they had to make their way through a crowd. Georges recalled those long-distant minutes of his first day, during which the Infirmary Sister had busied herself about storing his luggage, which would never again take the road to St Claude's. As Father Lauzon had said of Alexander, Georges was very different now to what he had been on arrival. The changes which he had discovered in himself during the Easter holidays were taking him much farther than he would then have believed. The trunk and suitcase now restored to him seemed not relics of his friendship, to use Father Lauzon's words, but relics of his former existence.

The luggage had to be left at the foot of each boy's bed. The servants would wheel them to the station on a barrow the next day. The boys who would be going home by road had prepared labels, which they proudly gummed to the lids, saying, "Not to be taken."

Georges had persuaded his parents to come and fetch him by train, in the hope of being able to travel with Alexander. His idea was that Father Lauzon would not trouble to take charge of him if he saw him in his father and mother's care.

What, Georges wondered, should his packing entail? Should he take everything, including the new pyjamas given him by Father de Trennes, and the hair-bleach which would enable him to bleach another lock of his hair? To avoid attracting comment from Lucien he decided to act as if he were returning in the new school year. And it crossed his mind that away over in the junior dormitory, beside the bed which Georges had now seen, Alexander was probably saying, as he placed this or that article in his trunk, "This I will put in my bag, when Georges and I go away. But not that."

The year's last study period began with a recitation of the rosary. The Supervisor expounded the mystery of each decade, then pointed, row by row, to a boy who was to begin each prayer, all the others responding. Georges was gratified with one of the glorious mysteries. The honour was naturally due to a boy who was distinguishing himself in the way of mortification.

Thereafter, Georges looked over his books: these, naturally, he was leaving behind. In the letter which he proposed to write to Lucien, after his flight from home, he would make him a present of them. And of his own work he would keep only a single essay, the one he had written for his own pleasure only—the second "Portrait of a Friend".

Looking at his Virgil, he recalled the passages which had moved him in that work, despite his disgust with the end of *Alexis*. It was under cover of this book that he had unfolded Alexander's first note. He thought of the Virgilian Lots, concerning which *le Tatou* had digressed in a gloss, recently, when they had been set a passage of the *Aeneid*. It occurred to him to have recourse to this method to see what Fate had in store for him. He opened the book at random: the running head showed him he was among the eclogues—

Eclogue V. It seemed to him that his lot would be found at the top of the left-hand page. He read:

*Extinction Nymphae crudeli funere Daphnim / ftebant . . .*

He stopped and transferred his attention to the first two lines on the right, which he translated as follows: “Often, from those drills to which we have entrusted the plump barley corns, spring wretched tares and sterile weeds.”

True, in the end, Daphnis, in dying, became a god, and that already rejoicings at his memory had been referred to. The story ended worse, but more honourably, than *Alexis*.

The Virgilian Lots had better be relegated to the same attic as the Sibyl of Panzoust. Let nymphs and sowers of barley weep as much as they liked. For Georges and Alexander there was no question of death or bad harvests. Nor, reverting to the Superior’s figure of speech, were their good “sowings” spiritual. They were, rather, those which had inspired Alexander’s best weekly French essay; and “The Death of Daphnis” was certainly not in the same class as “The Death of Hector”—the composition which had gained him his highest place in form. Alexander and Georges were leaving St Claude’s to live, not to die. The same god protected them, the god of Thespis and of the universe, a god who was truer than Virgil.

At that point in Georges’ reflections, Father Lauzon opened the door and beckoned to him out of the room. He had not put himself to so much trouble since the evening when “his first penitent”, as he had called him, had asked to see him. What did the frou-frou of that soutane in the corridors portend? Was Georges about to be told that the prize for religious

instruction was to be his after all? He felt no anxiety, certain as he was that henceforth they could do no more against Alexander and himself. However, when they reached the Father's room, the expression of his face began to worry Georges.

"Georges", the Father said—it was the first time he had used his Christian name—"you already know about whom I have to talk to you. I have need, now, not only of your prayers, but of your active help. That lad seems to be possessed by a satanic will. According to him—and it would be a blasphemy if it were true—it is to please me that he is abstaining from communion, and to avoid pleasing me that he is abstaining from confession. Such impudence, in a boy so young, is without precedent! What is purity without humility? Pride alone was enough to bring about the downfall of angels. The angel of the college indeed!

"I was already deploring his persistence in an attitude contrary to your own, and I should not have suspected the reasons for his resistance had he not, in the end, submitted them. Georges, this is going to surprise you: he is sustained in his obstinacy by the conviction that your feelings for him have not changed. In the talk which I had with him this morning, and during which I was rather severe with him, he had the effrontery to claim that you would be meeting him during this summer, that you had promised to do so, and that your promise had recently been renewed in writing. I trust you too well, now, to believe in these claims in so far as they affect the future, or for that matter the present, but I want to show him, once and for all, that your common past is dead indeed. This I regard as essential in order to prevent some folly or wild action on his part. And it cannot be done unless I can return him, in your name, all the notes and letters you have ever received from him."

Georges caught a glimpse of himself in the looking-glass which hung on the wall beside

the window. He had become very pale. The Father noticed his pallor—his feelings were even more apparent now than on the last occasion—and said:

“I can understand that such an action must be offensive to your delicacy, but the importance of the interests at stake must be paramount. Were I to spare you this, I should be leaving you under the burden of a most dreadful responsibility. Can a few vain keepsakes be allowed to weigh in the balance against eternity? This sacrifice, to which, no doubt, a soul will owe its salvation, will complete the purification of your own. Call to mind St Jerome, who had carried the works of his beloved Cicero with him into the desert; as he slept, a voice told him, ‘You are not a Christian; you are a Ciceronian.’ He destroyed the vestiges of past and dead tastes. Then, later, there was St Philippe de Neri, who destroyed the profane poetry he had written in his youth. Let these examples inspire you. At your age you cannot choose too elevated an example, and perhaps you have not forgotten those suggested by our preacher at the beginning of this year. You will, therefore, consent to what I ask without regrets. Let me hasten to add that I shall not read your correspondence—I gave up reading romances many years ago.”

“I have none of the notes here,” Georges said, faintly, in a faltering voice. “They all belong to the second term, and I left them at home during Easter.”

“Oh, I thought, since before Easter you told the Superior that you had never received any notes, that they must have been written this term.”

He looked at Georges for a moment, his look conveying that, henceforth, lying would be out of the question: Alexander and he had both, in their fashion, at last told the truth. Then the priest added:

“Never mind. Let us not rake up the past. I believe your word, and I shall not insult you by demanding to see your wallet. As soon as you get home, you can send me all the notes to S., by registered letter. It is essential that I act without delay. One day’s delay might be fatal. Consequently I shall be absolutely ruthless with you, upon whom the remedy in this case depends. Let us calculate the times precisely, as we did when the matter was your admission to the Congregation. Today is the tenth; you leave here on the eleventh. If I do not receive the notes by the thirteenth I shall return at once to St Claude’s and arrange for your immediate expulsion. It would be a pity to spoil our national festival—the news would reach your home on the fourteenth.

“Excuse the want of ceremony in this admonition. You have withdrawn from the game, yet you are not entirely quit of it. The accursed spirit which possessed you has transferred itself to your former accomplice; your image is still with him, and we must efface it. That is the point at which we must strike swift and hard. I have the right to require your co-operation. We are dealing with a boy whom I considered my spiritual son and who, because of you, is now the son of nobody. You took him away not only from his spiritual director, and from his parents, but from God. You are under an obligation to restore him to them; he has been too exclusively yours. Indeed, the very friendship you bear him requires you to make him the fullest reparation in your power. One day you will thank me for having put you to this trial, when you are in a position to realise the good which will have resulted from it. And the boy, too, will thank you, for by then he will understand that you did, indeed, love him.”

The sounds of the tea-time bell, and shortly thereafter the voices of boys in the inner

courtyard, had accompanied Father Lauzon's final words. Georges, leaving the priest's room, hardly had the heart to rejoin his friends. As he had done on the day after the grand outing, he went to the dormitory in order to be alone and collect his thoughts in his unhappiness. The noises from outside seemed to come from some other and unknown world. He felt himself more utterly alone than he had been the last time, when there was silence. He felt as if he were in a desert, confronted by limbo. And tears, now, would have seemed ludicrous, derisory. There was, now, another thing which seemed equally ludicrous: their project for running away. The inflexible assurance of Father Lauzon showed him, starkly, how precarious his own position was. The man they had so long deceived now knew all, and consequently would foresee every move. There was no longer any point in struggling. They, the two boys, were irrevocably defeated.

The surveillance to which Alexander had been subjected during the Easter holidays was a foretaste of the precautions which would certainly be taken during the summer ones. Georges and he would not see each other again after they had left the school. The Father had only to say the word, and no meeting between them would be allowed or tolerated. They were prisoners of the establishment. Even their keepsakes, their memories, were to be taken from them. Georges was to be the first to make this sacrifice. To refuse would be to transfer the whole tragedy into the bosom of his family, and that to no purpose. To submit would be to add shame to the rest of his misfortunes. But was he free not to submit? Father Lauzon's summons was in some ways reminiscent of Father de Trennes'. Georges had been in a position to defend himself against the latter; faced with the other, he was weaponless. Once again, it seemed, the priest who was worthy of respect was to obtain what the other, the

questionable priest, had wanted and tried to get. And their adversary was to have nothing left him but the meagre satisfaction of having been able to save his wallet from a third perquisition.

What a simpleton he had been to admit that he still had the notes! He had answered as if he really believed in the responsibility which Father Lauzon had talked about. He had managed things better in the matter of that other responsibility the Superior had imposed on him in the case of Father de Trennes. He blamed himself, certainly, but he also blamed Alexander as the principal artisan of the catastrophe; he blamed him for having made all his, Georges', efforts useless, for having, in fact, behaved like a child indeed. In the case of the March incident, Alexander had blundered; he had allowed Father Lauzon to realise that his relations with Georges were more intimate than Georges had admitted, but the daily communion business had got them out of that. This time he had taken pleasure in exasperating the man whose affection was distasteful to him; he had forgotten that that affection was his protection. Had he really supposed that the priest would for ever be satisfied to do no more than recite prayers? Did he think he could wear him down by a persistent display of courage? Or had he, rather, supposed that such a degree of candour would never be taken seriously, so that he could safely enjoy the pleasure of deceiving by being frank? At all events, this brashness had made impossible what, perhaps, might have been possible. And half out of weariness, half out of carelessness, Georges had done the rest. The two friends had themselves destroyed their condemned friendship. They could have saved it only by prodigies of adroitness, a well-matured plan, and patient endeavour. They had let themselves be caught out by reacting differently to the twists and traps of interrogation, just

as they had let themselves be caught together in that hut. They had the means neither to revolt nor to vindicate themselves. And the partnership they had dreamed of was to remain no more than a dream.

When the bell rang for the end of tea-time, the sound echoed in Georges' empty heart like a knell. Mechanically, he went downstairs.

The final sermon of the Retreat. The Superior announced that he would deal with the subject of holidays. It was the subject with which he had begun the year with the seniors, and he was ending on the same note with the whole school.

"The holidays," he said. "What magic in that word! I do not know if there is any word which gives you as much pleasure as that one. Yet the holidays, to which you look forward so impatiently, are a serious matter, the most serious of the whole year. Here, the sacraments, work, discipline, combine to keep you in the right path, and there is established, quite naturally, among boys fortified with good principles, that emulation in well-doing upon which I was congratulating myself, yesterday, in your presence. But during the holidays you are idle, your own masters, you can relax and neglect the sacraments. A certain holy priest has said it—'There is a devil in wait under every leaf for the schoolboy made free of the fields.' In the fields, under every leaf; and in the city, under every paving-stone; in the mountains under every stone and bush; at the seaside under every wave and every grain of sand.



“Holidays are the schoolboy’s paradise; but in every paradise there is a serpent on the watch and there are forbidden fruits. I am going to distinguish five categories of holidays, or at least give them five different marks, as if they were prep. Thus here are holidays I would mark *Excellent*; others, *Good*; others, *Passable*; others, again, *Indifferent*; and yet others, *Bad*.”

He fell silent, assumed an expression of severity, and resumed, pronouncing each word clearly and separately.

“I cannot allow anything less than *Good*; and I like to think you will attain *Excellent*.

“In order to help you to this end, I shall have distributed to you, with your holiday tasks, a rule for the holidays, which I am about to read aloud. Thus, having ensured the maintenance of your intellectual activities, we shall also be attending to your moral welfare. This little catechism is, moreover, accompanied by a short calendar of the liturgical feasts—there is no need for me to repeat that your religious life, also, continues outside college.” The Superior, it seemed, could foresee that there were dangers to be faced. He had more perspicacity as to the holidays than inside St Claude’s. Perhaps his holiday rule would make up for his statistics and his sonnets.

Georges looked about him at his schoolfellows. The seriousness which they were still affecting was mildly ironical; their attitude already bore witness to a certain independence. It was clear that the rule, now being read out to them with so much care, was going to be obeyed in reverse. Hardly a boy but was chuckling internally.

“ . . . laziness in getting up is bad for the character. Without being quite as early risers as you are here, be out of bed between seven and eight, no later.

“Go to mass at least three times a week, and if possible take holy communion. And, of course, be scrupulous about both these duties on Sundays and saints’ days, having been to confession the previous evening—attend vespers on those occasions.

“Then, two good hours’ work, devoted chiefly to your holiday tasks, and to edifying or instructive reading—no light reading of course.

“Do not forget to ask a blessing before meals; say it aloud, preferably in the name of the whole company at table. And the same for grace after meals.

“In the afternoon, an outing, perhaps a walk, with your family, with college friends, or with other reliable and virtuous friends. A short visit to a church—it is up to you to persuade your companions to go in with you.

“It is indispensable that you should keep in close touch with the vicars or curates of wherever you may be. But that does not mean that you need not write to the director of your conscience—you are to do so regularly.

“After dinner, early to bed. Say your prayers on your knees, both morning and night, either on the bed, or beside it—not *in* it, if you please . . .”

Away in front there, Alexander, with folded arms, appeared to be listening to the Superior with respectful attention. One might have thought him incapable of passing his holidays otherwise than in the manner being set forth with such precision, so neatly divided into three, intellectual, religious and moral, with family walks, letters to his confessor, visits to churches, prayers on, or beside, his bed. Whereas Alexander was no doubt thinking of the

holidays as arranged with Georges, eternal holidays remote from all this; holidays which he would never have.

That evening the Supervisor withdrew into his own room very early, leaving the dormitory at liberty. He wanted them to remember him with kindness. In any case he knew that his authority expired with that day, and did as he had done on their bathing excursions, when he pretended absence of mind. It would have been possible to hear what each boy was saying, if the general uproar had not been so loud. Some boys were even walking about, getting a breath of air. They might almost have been in the playground during break.

Lucien had sat down on the bedside table, as Father de Trennes had formerly done. He leaned back against Georges' pillow. Georges had told him about Father Lauzon's plans, without saying anything about the extent to which they had changed his own. He had admitted that he was now resigned to obedience. So they were now of one mind. They were perhaps the only pair in the dormitory who kept their voices low.

Lucien was making a last effort to state the facts as he saw them.

"What has happened will not prevent the Motiers from going on holiday somewhere or other. Maurice will let you know where. You can write to him all right, as you told the kid. And if you're afraid that having successfully read hearts, Lauzon may start reading letters, you can arrange with Maurice to use the poste restante: he's not a chap to object, or lose his head over a thing like that.

"You say you can arrange to go where you like, you can arrange to go where Alexander is, and thrash things out with him personally. Father Lauzon won't be following him

everywhere, up hill and down dale, against wind and tide, across the meadows and over the mountains. And what if he is there, armed with a holy-water sprinkler, hunting his ubiquitous devils! You've a perfect right to be there too—after all, you've been restored to favour, you're a rehabilitated angel. Besides, you can cover yourself by charming his people—that's what André did in my case.

It all comes back to what that chap said—dance with their mothers!”

Lucien at least succeeded in eliciting a faint smile from Georges, who, however, said, “Never mind dancing. Alexander's disappointment will be frightful. He'll never forgive me for giving up his notes.”

“You could tear them up, like Isabelle does Léandre's. But that won't get you very far! Set your mind at rest, Alexander isn't going to kill himself over a bagatelle like that—he'll soon get over it, and so will you. The other time, in your bout with the Superior, you acted contrary to what he wanted, but he soon realised you were right. He's bound to see that it's no use the pair of you going on putting yourselves in the wrong by trying to defy the whole human race!

“He's third in history in his form, and can hardly be ignorant of the fact that the greatest captains are sometimes beaten. The proper course is to retreat, with the honours of war, and wait for another chance. At first that looks like the opposite of what our old friend Herodotus was telling you, through my mouth, the other day. ‘One succeeds by trying again and again.’ But in fact it's the same thing, as you can see. You give ground, because you're sure of recovering it. Isn't that why you gave way, the Superior gave way, Father Lauzon gave way? And your beloved Alexander did likewise, for all his bravery: he has not dared

take communion, leave study, or write to you—he hasn't answered the note you said you were writing to calm him down. In fact, of course, he's realised that your friendship can get along without meetings and sweet nothings. It follows that he already knows that there is more to come—that your friendship has weightier titles than a few notes. You saw that yourself, during that row you and he had, and I told you the incident was nothing. The important things aren't rose-water, nor holy water, but the drop of blood you exchanged."

"Reminding me of that makes it clear what I owe to him and myself. Tomorrow I shall send him a last note and tell him the whole story."

"Wonderful! He'll take it as proof that you love him and cling like a limpet to his idea of doing a bunk. He'll guess that, at bottom, you'd really like to run away, and he'll come and turf you out, closely pursued by the medical father and the father confessor, who'll soon be in conference with the father marquis. I fear that your situation may then be a shade grotesque. The Superior's experience must have warned you that, with kids, ridicule is dangerous. And there'll be worse—they'll shove you both into a special school, where you're watched—two different ones, I mean, of course! Your wisest course is to do what Lauzon requires you to. And you might just as well resign yourself to the fact that, for a while, Alexander has got to think you don't care for him any longer—while believing that you still do. It's very complicated, very unpleasant but very necessary."

Through the open window Georges could see the clear July sky, luminous with stars to which, perhaps, at this very moment, Alexander was talking about him, and already dreaming of some other, alien sky, taking leave of his college nights. Georges envied the boy in his illusions and his trust. For himself, their happiness no longer existed. Lucien had tried

to give him hope that their luck would change, but he had to force himself to believe it—in vain. He had ceased to hope. The image of Father Lauzon was constantly before his eyes. Pitilessly, it obscured Alexander's, just as Father de Trennes' had, in these same surroundings, sometimes darkened it. That bit of Herodotus had only a limited validity. Lucien himself had, in the end, recognised that if repeated efforts lead to success, they may also lead to failure. He had approved, in the name of that common sense which the Superior had admired in him, the measures adopted by their Confessor in the name of morality. And that was what he, Georges, now had instead of an incomparable friendship—morality and common sense. That which had begun in glory, legend, divinity, was ending, it seemed, in a wretched flatness, in platitudes. Obedience, ceasing to be a ruse, had become a law, imposed, in the midst of a host of disasters, in order to prevent an even worse disaster. And, as his supreme punishment, Georges must appear to be a coward. Having betrayed Lucien and Father de Trennes, he was now to betray Alexander: a fitting end to his works!

He judged himself to be a victim of fatality. His friendship was subject to a series of established rules and laws, like the order of the planets. And the gods who had favoured him could do nothing against *Ananke*.

But at least Georges was grateful to Lucien for having dissuaded him from writing to Alexander tomorrow. He would have been ashamed to be forced to tell the tale of his defeat to one who, according to Father Lauzon, was sustained only by the thought of him. Lucien would certainly have thought things even more awkward had he known that, far from calming Alexander, Georges' note must have encouraged him. If, now, he turned suddenly round the other way, would he not seem to have awaited the very hour of departure before breaking, to

his friend, the news that he was abandoning him? Georges wanted to carry away with him, from St Claude's, a smile of affection, not a look of contempt. He had thought he would be leaving this school to plunge into real life. As it was, he saw himself obliged to lie, in this matter of his friendship, as he had been forced to lie in the matter of his religious instruction essay. All his truths were to end in a lie.

Something Lucien had said crossed his mind again: "Alexander won't kill himself." To be sure, Georges had never proposed to be the death of anyone, least of all Alexander. He had never witnessed the death of anybody of his age, and even the idea of death called to mind little more than passages from Bossuet and the Superior's meditations. As for suicide, it was nothing but a scholastic theme. He thought of those religious instruction periods in which the subject had been discussed. He could have written the best paper on that, too, if he had been allowed to. "Those who deliberately take their own life" was number four in the list of seven categories of sinners to be refused "ecclesiastical burial". There were also "heathen, Jews, Moslems and children dead without baptism; apostates, Freemasons and excommunicates". In addition there were those who had died in a duel, or who had left orders for their body to be burnt, and finally "public and manifest sinners".

Everyone in the dormitory was awake well before the usual time, although reveille, that morning, was actually later. Boys stood with their elbows on the window-sills, sunning themselves in the first dawn radiance. Others were sitting on their beds, combing their hair. Somebody was blowing his nose to the tune of the "Marseillaise". Yet others were doing their last packing or fastening their trunks. Georges realised that he had packed his in the

manner the situation called for: it was the trunk of a boy leaving for the holidays, not for ever. There was nothing to stop him returning to St Claude's, since there was now no question of being with Alexander elsewhere. The situation was the reverse of that obtaining on the day after the grand outing: it was then Alexander only who was supposed to be returning to the college.

There was no meditation period; they went straight to chapel. The last mass of the year, like the first, was red. Georges was sorry that the Cardinal, expected later, was not there to celebrate mass. That would have made a fitting end to the year; there would have been just that much more red. What was today's red for? And yesterday's liturgical ornaments had also been red. Georges turned to his missal, which he had not been reading much lately. "July 10th. The Seven Martyr Brothers. July 11th. St Pius." In the office for the Seven Brothers, Georges came across these words: "*Our soul is escaped even as a bird out of the snare of the fowler; the snare is broken, and we are delivered.*"

Juniors and seniors hastened to the front to take communion: the Superior's statistics must be worthily rounded off. Alexander alone remained in his distant place—thinking himself already free of all nets. The salve of the Holy Sacrament followed the mass, and was followed by the singing of the *Te Deum*. And perhaps there were other boys, besides Georges, who were thanking God for having succeeded, up to the end, in duping their masters.

The assembly hall had never been more crowded. Georges was sitting beside his parents. He could see Father Lauzon sitting in the front row, next to the Cardinal, in one of

the green padded seats where he himself had sat on the Academy's public session day. He recalled the first of the alarms which had disturbed his friendship with Alexander, the day after that occasion; and the performance of *Polyeucte* which had revealed their friendship to Father de Trennes. Now, in this same hall, he was once again about to earn public applause, but all on the ruins of that same friendship, for which he had fought so hard.

He no longer tried to look for Alexander, or to be seen by him. Yet their eyes had met, across the hall, almost as soon as they took their places.

Speech in hand, the Superior rose:

“Eminence, despite the infinite and varied calls upon your time made by your pastoral responsibilities, you have made a point of returning among us, and we are deeply conscious of the honour done to us. Yesterday, you were still at Lourdes, offering the solemn thanks of the diocese at the feet of Our Lady, and praying for France. May it be given to us to emulate the unwearying activity of a soul fired with zeal for the holy causes of Church and Motherland!”

He then went on to a panegyric on classical culture, which helped the country either to win its victories or, on the other hand, raise itself from defeat. “A civilisation,” he said, “is a matter of souls, of spirits. And strength of spirit always, in the long run, triumphs over mere material strength.” He announced himself satisfied with the year's work, touched on the brilliant results obtained by baccalaureate candidates, and, in his peroration, paid homage to his charges for their efforts and their piety. “Thus it is, my dear boys, that we can hand you over to your parents with the feeling that you have deserved your holidays; and even more deserved the blessing which, before he leaves you, His Eminence will call down upon you

in the name of our Divine Master—*In nomine Domini*.”

“Amen,” said Lucien, who was sitting behind Georges.

The senior school prefect read out the prize-list. The principal prize-winners were applauded, and there was a general bustle as they came and went to and from the platform, receiving their prizes. This went on and on. At last came the third-form list: “Excellence: first prize, Georges de Sarre . . . Religious Instruction, *proxime accessit*, Georges de Sarr . . .” But a perfect rain of first prizes poured down on Georges de Sarre: diligence (class-work and preparation); French composition; Latin translation; Greek translation; English. And second prizes—history, Latin grammar, Greek grammar. Despite all he was undergoing to disgust him, he enjoyed this: it was some reward for his pains.

Going up for his prizes, he met Lucien on the same errand—he was going up to receive a book which represented his second prize for mathematics and his second prize for English. Side by side, they had made their bow to the Cardinal, who had given Georges a kindly little nod and said, at the same time, “Very good! Well done! I shall congratulate your parents.”

Walking back to his place, the youthful laureate did not look at Alexander.

He, Alexander, had only two *accessits*, in French and botany. Georges would have liked to stand up and shout, to say, “I only wanted my prizes for your sake—take them all, they were won for you.” But he dared not even raise his head. Dishonour was his real prize, his only prize. The college was not to spare him even this last example of disparity between appearances and reality.

He glanced at his prize books. On the inside of each cover was a label bearing the arms of St Claude’s, his name, and these words: “Nine prizes, and ten citations.” However, he no

more had nine volumes than Lucien had two: the good Fathers were adept at “grouping” their prizes. Georges had received four: a Racine—possible an allusion to his *Léandre*; an *Œuvres Choisis* of Henri de Bornier—he would have preferred Henri de Regnier; *Cicero and his Friends*—“Georges and his friends”. And, fourthly, his Greek prize, *Praxiteles*—which brought in the “Cupid of Thespis”. The latter work, like the first, was illustrated. Georges looked through its contents list, impatient to see whether, among the reproductions, his favourite was to be found: it would have been a delicate attention on the Superior’s part. However, that plate was not included.

The day was an important one for the kitchen Sisters: so many people to serve, and among them a Cardinal! On the other hand there was the prospect of a good “offering” from all the parents present. Georges’ people having come by train could not take him out to lunch to their usual place. They were put with Lucien’s parents in the big dining-room, and they were enjoying their day in college. They would be better off where they were than under the covered ambulatory round the playground, where tables had also been set up. Georges and Lucien, suitably complimented, had raced upstairs to add their diplomas and prizes to their luggage.

Lucien was happy. Everything was going well for him. Last year he had only received two *accessits*, like Alexander this year. In a few days he would be off to the mountains to join André. He threw his book up into the air, and caught it after clapping his hands behind his back, aping a little girl playing ball. It was not a very respectful way to treat *Le Génie du Christianisme*, second prize for English and mathematics. (Probably Father Lauzon had been more concerned to reward the Congregationist than the mathematician, while the English

master, no less subtly, had ratified the choice of a work written in England.) The prize volume ended up on the floor, opening as if to offer two pages to the prize-winner's meditation: was Chateaubriand, like Virgil, also among the prophets? Lucien, confronted with a chapter title, burst out laughing: "Habits of water-fowl. Goodness of Providence." M. de Quatrefages had had nothing to say for Providence in the matter of his lizards.

The Cardinal condescended to preside over the meal in the refectory. The Superior pronounced a few words of gratitude to His Eminence. Then, lowering his voice, as if what followed was between the boys and himself, he said, "Try to moderate your high spirits, boys: we must not incommode His Eminence." Which the entire school greeted with a shout of "Long live His Eminence!" But thereafter the talk was more or less in whispers, and the contrast between that and the preceding clamour was so odd that Monseigneur seemed much amused. This was interpreted as permission to modify their restraint, and a sort of happy mean was established.

Alexander frequently turned towards Georges and smiled. But exuberant spirits were so general that Father Lauzon was not likely to notice. The curtain between boys and masters was already coming down. Even His Eminence was probably talking about holidays. Georges was, in all likelihood, the only one present who was thinking of the next school year. And it gave him pain to dwell on the fact that he would be seeing this refectory again, but that Alexander would not be there.

Leaving the table, Georges asked Maurice if he knew where they were going for the holidays.

“I’m afraid they’ll be pretty measly,” Maurice replied. “There’s been some sort of a row between my brother and old Lauzon—Lord knows what about. I shouldn’t be surprised if we stay home at S. for the whole summer. I’ve some more news for you—we shan’t be seeing you at St Claude’s again. It was arranged this morning, with my people. It seems the air here doesn’t suit us.” And he added, in a joking tone, “We are to resume family life. You know what that means, in my case.”

Never had Georges felt so embarrassed. It was extremely distasteful to talk about Alexander after such an allusion. He would be committing the same crime as Maurice himself had committed when, after certain confidences of the same order but more detailed, he had gone on to talk of his brother. But this was no time for scruples or hesitations. Lowering his eyes Georges said, “Will you do something for me?”

“You want me to leave you Richepin’s poems?”

“Nothing like that. You remember the day your brother came to our playground? Well, after that, we became friends. What I should like is to be able to write to him, through you, without Father Lauzon knowing anything about it.”

Maurice was gaping with astonishment. After a moment’s silence, which seemed very long to Georges, he burst out laughing.

“Good Heavens!” he said. “So the ‘crisis’, the ‘hunchback’, the row—was *you*!”

He stared at the top boy of his form with an expression which made the latter blush—and less innocently than on the occasion of Maurice’s remark about red ties. He said, “At your orders, Monsieur le comte.”

It was as if, by that form of words, he wanted to restore Georges’ assurance, and at the

same time admit himself gratified to be helping so aristocratic an intrigue, and even, perhaps, his brother's involvement in it. Georges looked him straight in the eyes, like Alexander answering one of Father Lauzon's insulting questions.

"My friendship with your brother," he said, "is not what you are thinking. You have my word for that, and consequently I shall be obliged if you refrain from teasing him about it." "Good Lord, *I* don't care what sort of friendship it is! I couldn't be less worried!"

"But worry a little more about Father Lauzon, will you?" "Don't get het up about that. The Superior was one too many for me, but our old friend won't be. Not even Father de Trennes could out-manceuvre me now, for all his Latin and Greek. I defy the whole priesthood!"

The Rouvères had to pay a visit to *le Tatou*. Georges suggested a walk to his parents, while waiting for the two school plays. There was no hurry: *Richard Cœur de Lion* was on first. He wanted to show them the view from the terrace. In order to shorten the way, or so he said, he took them by the footpath and not the main walk. His mother admired the fine orange-trees. He took them into the conservatory. Near to the staging he saw the stub of a cigarette, one of those he had smoked with Alexander. He crushed it under foot, as he had stamped down the gladioli, and as Father Lauzon had crushed the cigarettes in the gardener's hut.

Turning round to return, he thought he must be dreaming: he saw his invisible guide emerge suddenly from the footpath. Alexander appeared, light, miraculous, just as he had appeared at their first assignation, and as if he had guessed at this last one. He presented

himself to Georges, in this setting of their former triumphs, on the very day which marked the end of them. Silently he placed his finger on his lips—a kiss as discreet as the one he had thrown to Georges during his refectory reading. Maurice, who followed his brother into the open, made Georges a quick sign of warning. Georges' smile vanished. M. and Mme Motier appeared, followed by Father Lauzon. The priest fell suddenly silent. Did this meeting strike him as singular? If the destination of that walk had been suggested by Alexander, would Father Lauzon not guess that this was by way of being a pilgrimage to memories, associations common to the boy and Georges de Sarre? At the very moment of parting them, he was now to learn what the college conservatory had meant to them. This day must complete what he had learnt on the day of the grand outing, and the two friends seemed to be confessing, in the fact of this chance encounter, the meetings they had enjoyed at this spot, sometimes shortly after leaving his confessional. Had he been a few minutes earlier he would have seen a piece of circumstantial evidence, albeit superfluous.

Georges, waiting to make his entrance, was thinking of deliberately making a mess of his part, by allowing his memory to fail, and forgetting his lines. It would be a sort of complement to his religious instruction essay, spoilt under orders. What a joy it would be to wreck the performance, to make a ruined *Plaideurs* pay for the change of a page in *Richard Cœur de Lion*. Léandre could embarrass Dandin, astound the Cardinal, distress the Superior—even more than the Dean who had sermonised them at Whitsun had distressed him—cause consternation to the Prefect, make fools of the masters who had awarded him so many prizes, but had given none to Alexander. Thus would he have liked to mortify the college which was

throwing away its finest jewel.

He knew perfectly well that these were nothing but fantasies, and like others which had filled his mind, he would not accomplish them. He thought of playing his part ill; he would play it as well as he could. He bore Dandin a grudge, but owed something to Isabelle. Above all, he owed something to Alexander. He could not pay him so strange a compliment, and one which would not be understood. The boy would feel himself belittled by such a turning of the play to ridicule. It was better to charm him to the very end, to leave him with yet one more happy memory, and so to play Léandre, for his sake, even better than he had read the speech on the Hôtel de Rambouillet, and the *Life of St Bernardin*.

It was also with Father Lauzon in mind that Georges decided to do his best. The man had foreseen everything, but not this—that one of the two friends would shine with a dangerous brilliance before the other, instead of trying to efface himself and his memory. He had deprived Alexander of his part; but it had not occurred to him that Georges' part in the senior play meant something to Alexander. He would be persuaded to join M. Hamon's colleagues in vituperating the performance of plays.

A few parsons of neighbouring parishes, appetites whetted by *Polyeucte*, and by the Cardinal's presence, had come to see *Les Plaideurs*. But Racine seemed to interest them less than Corneille. Or possibly His Eminence's presence constrained them to conduct themselves with more reserve, and not to lead all the applause. Besides, there was little they could have applauded with the same confidence; little but a "God willing" from the countess, an "Eh! Great God!" from Léandre, two or three "God knows if's . . ." and Chicaneau's line, "In the fear of God, sir, and of the watch." And to set against that the

clergy must have found “Devil take me!” and “Go to the Devil!” and expressions of that quality, somewhat awkward hearing.

The performance was perfect, the actors marvellous. But Léandre found the last two lines far from apt—

*. . . Let us speak of joy only:  
By your leave, peace! my father.*

After the curtain the promised photograph of the company, in their costumes, was taken.

“I can hardly wait for my copy,” Lucien told Georges. “Until he sees it André will never believe I’ve played Isabelle. He knows it isn’t my style. But is there anything one would not do, for you?”

Georges and Lucien were on their way to the station. They had decided that once in the train they would give their parents the slip and go from coach to coach looking for Alexander. In spite of his arrangements with Maurice, establishing epistolary contact, Georges still wanted to try for a personal explanation with Alexander. Nevertheless he had promised Lucien that there would be no question now of running away. By the time that they got to the station he was in a state of agitation.

But there, on the platform, was Father Lauzon, suitcase in hand, centre of the same group they had met near the conservatory. Fate had said its last word.

Georges’ eyes met Alexander’s, and he felt that he would have been content to die then

and there, before his friend, and when he had not yet been unworthy of him. Then the train was there, parting them; they got into different carriages, in different classes. And soon life would raise up another barrier between them, even more solid than that which had parted them in college.

Standing in the corridor with Lucien, Georges remained silent. He was thinking of Alexander. He watched the telegraph-wires which converged, then looped out, converged, looped out again, like the skein which the Fates spun for Alexander and him, twisting and retwisting the yam of their two destinies, first raising them towards heaven, then hurling them down to earth. But their destinies were severed from each other for ever now, and Alexander was still in ignorance of this fact, as André had been unconscious of his fate until the Prefect of Studies was upon him, and Father de Trennes until the Superior stood at his door. Probably Alexander was consoling himself for Father Lauzon's presence by recalling the look he had exchanged with Georges, and which, though he did not know it, was a farewell.

The train drew near to S., rocking over the points. If only they could have derailed it! Alexander was walking away down the platform, his raincoat over his arm, a light suitcase in one hand, one which perhaps he had deliberately chosen as suitable for his forthcoming journey. His mind must be full of many things which would never have occurred to him the first time Georges had watched him get out of a train at this same station. But he seemed as happy and high-spirited now as then. And he was more beautiful than ever, fresher, livelier.

Just before the barrier he turned round and, at the same moment, a cloud of steam drifted across the platform, concealing the travellers. And when this cloud had dispersed, like the

smoke of a sacrifice, Alexander had vanished.

Alone in his room at last, Georges was putting his things in order. He had just put on his pyjamas and was emptying the pockets of his suit onto the table. There was his wallet, his notebook, a curl from Léandre's wig, his nail-scissors, his parents' last letter, the envelope containing his school honours cards, and the Rule for the holidays.

He got his prize books out of his suitcase. The sight of them did not give him much pleasure. Were they not a kind of sordid wage for work done? It did not make any difference that the work was his own; he despised himself as much as he had used to despise those fifth-form boys whose compositions earned them a higher place in form than Alexander. He would have had more respect for prizes awarded not for Latin, Greek and so forth, but for friendship, for personal quality, prizes for faces, lips and eyes, prizes, in short, for what, being beyond price, should be most highly prized.

An idea crossed his mind: he would sacrifice his college prizes to Alexander, although not in the way which had occurred to him during the reading of the prize-winners' list. He would make a holocaust of them, a burnt offering, in his fireplace. But suppose he was asked for them? He could not be supposed to have left them behind. There would be more explanations to invent. Besides, it was probably not easy to incinerate four volumes. One page from each would have to represent them, to stand for the same tribute. But it must be the

most remarkable.

Which should he select from the *Selected Works of the Sieur de Bornier*? Georges, certainly, would have been very willing to burn the entire collected works of that author, even though he had been a member of the *Académie Française*. But “La Fille de Roland” reminded him of a passage of bravura learnt at St Claude’s—“The Song of the Swords”. That would be a tribute to his class. Having looked for the page in question he cut it out, with the scissors, taking great care so that the mutilation would not be visible to anyone.

Next he glanced through *Cicero and his Friends*. The chapter entitled “Coelius and Roman Youth in Caesar’s Time” seemed to him to be the most promising. He noted the translation of a poem addressed by Catullus to Lesbia:

. . . *Give me a thousand kisses, then a hundred, then a thousand, then another hundred, again a thousand, yet another hundred . . .*

“A shade daring for a third-form prize, *M. le Tatou*.” It reminded him of the lines by this same Catullus which he had recited to Alexander, concerning kisses also, but destined for Juventius—this man Catullus could leave nobody alone. Catullus’ kisses were put aside with M. de Bornier’s swords.

In the Racine, Georges came upon the author’s signed testament in facsimile:

. . . *I desire that after my death my body be carried to Port-Royal-des-Champs and that it be there buried in the cemetery, at the foot of M. Hamor’s grave, in memory of the*

*excellent education which I formerly received in that house, and of the great examples of piety and penitence which I saw there, and of which I have been but a sterile admirer . . .*

Was it not touching that the most illustrious author of his time should have chosen the scene of his childhood as the last asylum, and one of his masters as his last companion? He was, no doubt, giving due consideration to the treatise which this same M. Hamon had written, and which Father Lauzon had recommended Georges to read: *The Twenty-three Reasons for being Humble*.

The “great examples of piety and penitence” which had made such an impression on Racine at Port-Royal had not saved that establishment from being destroyed by the Sun King, if not actually by fire from Heaven. And what sort of memory would Georges retain of the education he had received at St Claude’s, that “fundamentally Christian education” vaunted in the school curriculum and rules, and which the Rule for the Holidays did much to reinforce? Would he, in the literary career which he proposed to adopt, begin by being excommunicated for his works, and end by writing hymns? Would he ask, in his will, to be buried at Father Lauzon’s feet—or Father de Trennes’? Racine’s testament joined the warlike song and amorous poem.

*Praxiteles*. In default of “The Cupid of Thespis”, which was the best of the plates? The pose of a young faun had a slight likeness to Alexander’s, as he leant against that tree, on the day they had first gone swimming. That would do very well. Yet it was a pity to have mutilated so handsome a volume.

Georges put the four pages into the hearth and set fire to them. The flame shot up brightly.

He watched the paper curl and twist; for a moment the fragile charred films seemed about to rise in the air and fly away; then they collapsed into ashes. He lowered the curtain over the hearth, not so much upon those ashes as upon his year in college.

His table was embellished with a vase of red roses, an attention he owed to his mother. He smelt them, breathing in their scent voluptuously, as Alexander had breathed in the scent of orange flowers. The scent of these flowers, which Father de Trennes called mystical, was a little overpowering for a bedroom. But Georges always slept with his windows open.

Although he had gone late and tired to bed, he awoke early in the morning, thinking he could hear the college bell. He had a full day before him. He took out the box in which he had, with so much love, locked Alexander's notes and letter. Although the box had been shut away, a thin film of dust had settled on the lid. He blew it off, and unlocked the box: the letter and the notes appeared. He took them out and found Lucien's letters underneath them: only these would be left to him.

He sat down on his couch to re-read Alexander's messages. The flowers which he had put into the envelope at Easter fell out, dried and withered. Between the lines of the handwriting which was so dear to him, he could already see what he was about to write to Father Lauzon. What manner of answer was he preparing to make to this most affectionate of letters? At the idea of sacrificing this unique letter, he revolted. Nor could he send away all the notes. He would keep the first, in which Alexander had first written his name; and the one in which a lock of the boy's hair had been enclosed, because he was going to keep that too. Furthermore, he must avoid showing the one which included the mutilated hymn; it, like

the letter, was apt to shock Father Lauzon, if the priest did not keep his promise not to read them. And it went without saying that he would keep the note received after the grand outing, since he had admitted to receiving no notes that term. All in all, he would be abandoning only the postcard, and the other two early notes—the one with “I am happy”, not very compromising, and the note of Alexander censuring him. Then, thinking it over, he decided that he could not let the card go: there rang, in its eloquent brevity, the rallying cry which was recalled in Alexander’s last message: “Always.” He decided to keep that, too.

Dressing, after his breakfast, he thought about the letter he must presently dispatch. And he was very soon forced to admit that the sacrifice of only two notes would be useless. Alexander would realise that Georges had once again deceived Father Lauzon while seeming to obey him, and that, as Lucien had said, would confirm him in his resolve. Now, it was imperative that he give up all idea of their adventure, and the only way of making him do so was the one the Father had devised, and Lucien approved of. Whichever way Georges turned, the same dilemma faced him: he must either condemn Alexander to a brief and passing unhappiness, or let him involve himself and everyone else in a whole series of misfortunes and misunderstandings.

Even more than on that night when he had gone to the Superior and denounced himself, was Georges obliged to sacrifice the superfluous to the essential—the precious “superfluous” which, that same night, he had contrived to save as well. He would have to send back all the notes, including the last.

He went down to the estate office for writing-paper and returned to his room: there, he could be alone. He shut and locked the door and sat down. His first care was to copy notes,

postcard and letter into his notebook. Then he wrote as follows :

*M., July 12th*

*Father,*

*Following your instructions, I am sending you herewith all that I have of Alexander Motier's.*

*Believe me, Father, yours respectfully,*

*G. de Sarre*

When he had written the address he was suddenly possessed by a kind of rage. His name was Georges de Sarre, he was in his own house, and yet this priestling had brought him to this!

He had an impulse to tear up the letter and all its contents. It would not have been a motion of either prudence or wiliness, as in Isabelle's case—Lucien had jokingly suggested that he should take her for his example. But it would have been the gesture of a free man. Then he would burn the pieces, as he had burned the four pages cut from his prizes. He would write to the Father explaining why he had done so. He would swear, on the honour of his name, that none of these relics now existed, and would ask him to show the letter to Alexander. The boy would give up his project; but he would not despise his friend, and the honour of their friendship would be saved.

Georges raised the curtain concealing the hearth: there lay yesterday's ashes, fluttering. Would it not be a crime to reduce to that condition a treasure which, once their ordeal was

over, might one day be restored to him? For a moment he hesitated, then decided on a compromise: he would not, after all, hand over everything to the enemy. He took the first note, the lock of hair, the Easter letter, and the latest message out of the envelope.

At the post office he filled in the form for registered letters. At the clause: *Declared value*, he hesitated. But he would not declare the value of this dispatch—though it was greater than any he would send for the rest of his life. To his question, the clerk replied that the letter would certainly reach its destination the next day. And the man, as he struck the envelope three times with his rubber stamp, became no less odious to him than the hairdresser who, in the Easter holidays, had seized hold of the lock of fair hair.

Yesterday, at dinner, Georges had asked no questions about the holidays; the subject had ceased to interest him. Now, during luncheon, his parents began to show surprise at his indifference. He said that he had not forgotten that they were going to the Basque coast.

“We have a surprise for you,” his father said, “the Rouvères have given us the idea of going to the Pyrenees instead, which means you won’t be parted from your beloved Lucien—I know you’re inseparable. Always supposing we can still get rooms.”

Domestic surprises, it seemed, were even more overwhelming than college ones. This was the last straw! After this final blow Georges felt that he had nothing more to fear from Fate. He was to rejoin Lucien, whom André would have rejoined. His holidays were to be spent far from Alexander, contemplating that pair of real inseparables, whom he had thought to separate, and whose happiness survived his own.

The idea exasperated him: he could already see them condoling with him hypocritically then, little by little, withdrawing, as Lucien had done after his first spate of confidences, to

organise their nights out under the stars, as André had described in his letter, without him. He could already hear them, encouraging him with talk of the future, like priests evoking Heaven for a dying man.

True, he could count on their pity, even their sympathy. But he would have preferred their admiration. It had been up to him to keep it. Had not Lucien said that he admired him for having brought the conquest of Alexander to a successful conclusion? He would have admired him even more had he managed to remain worthy of it. Georges began to regret his letter, as much as he had regretted, when it was too late, his request to see the Superior, when he was proposing to betray André. He was surprised that he behaved so weakly, that he had been so fearful and biddable. He had judged Lucien with severity when Lucien had advised him to yield; but he had yielded. He had not been able to do otherwise, but he could not forgive himself for having done it. He loathed everything he saw about him—the luxurious interior to which, as it seemed to him now, he had sacrificed affection, and even those family memories and traditions of which he had sometimes been proud. And he welcomed as a relief his mother's suggestion to take him calling with her; it would distract him from his thoughts.

But that evening, when he went into his room and found his college things there to remind him of his predicament, his bitterness returned. He took up the list of school honours for the year, if only to read Alexander's name. It was not printed in capitals, that was a distinction reserved for prize-winners. But for Georges, it loomed larger even than the Cardinal's name displayed with typographical pomp upon the cover. For the splendour and secrets which that name concealed made it greater than all the rest. Its all too rare occurrences in the list were

at least apt in their placing. The *accessit* in French was a kind of tribute, albeit feeble, to the style of the boy's notes, which the Superior, governed by the canons of the *grand siècle*, had calumniated. The *accessit* in botany, too, was some memorial of the little bunch of wild flowers which Alexander had brought back with him after one of the weekly excursions. And Georges, whose name occurred so frequently one page beyond in the list, was indifferent now to all his distinctions but one, and that the most modest—the *accessit* he had received in religious instruction and which he had told his school acquaintances that he despised. For it was not to Alexander that he really owed his principal prizes—he had worked hard during the first term. But this *accessit* reminded him of the prize he had lost because of Alexander. The present was unhappy; but there had been happiness in the past.

July 13th. Georges' missive was to arrive, then, on a 13th of the month. The figure was lucky for some, unlucky for others; it was permissible to hope that one might find oneself on the lucky side.

Since the letter was arriving that day, Father Lauzon would be going to work at once. Consequently the great blow would be struck before evening fell. How would Alexander take it? In what terms would he judge the looks, words, notes and kisses that had passed between them, after so cruel a blow? Would he tell himself that it was a fine thing to be nobly bom and that, doubtless, it was necessary to be so if one was to dare behave so ignominiously? With what revulsion he would throw Georges' letters to him at Father Lauzon, in exchange for his own! And must not even the author of their humiliation compare his two victims, and value each according to his real quality? The future marquis of

St Claude's College was in danger of becoming a good deal less estimable than its former angel.

Georges would have liked to write a letter to Alexander: it would have given him the impression of doing something to repair the harm which another letter would be doing the boy within the next few hours. But he was too disturbed, too troubled to settle down to it. Luncheon he found odious. The Pyrenees occupied his dear parents' whole attention. A telegram had been sent to reserve rooms for the following Thursday. If the reply was favourable they would cancel the rooms which had been reserved elsewhere. Georges would have preferred to be deprived of any holiday at all, like Alexander. He could have wished, too, that he had no right to talk during meals, as when he was little. After the meal he refused the cigarette which, as an exceptional treat, his father offered him. He wanted to say that he smoked nothing but Egyptian tobacco. And there must be no rounds of calls with his mother today. He needed to be out, but alone, walking. He would not be back to tea. And leaving the house he slammed the massive door behind him.

He felt himself more than ever estranged from his parents. They belonged to the same world as his schoolmasters, the world which had barred his friendship. Alexander had been right: because they were children the right to love was denied them.

On the boulevard Georges turned away his eyes to avoid seeing a priest walking towards him, a priest with an air of conscious gentleness and his hands tucked into the sleeves of his cassock. Neither men nor women interested him: grown-up people seemed to him devoid of either mystery or beauty. He made up his mind that he would look only at children in the course of his walk: and he would use their faces to compose a kind of garland

to set about Alexander's, making a living crown in his honour.

There was no want of boys in the streets, now that the holidays had started, but whatever Georges might have thought, he found little to attract him in their faces. The boy his thoughts were fixed on, although only a memory, eclipsed them all, as he had done in present fact when he had suddenly appeared, that afternoon, on the river-bank. Georges studied the attitudes and movements of all the boys he met with: there was one, slight of build, who caught a fly with his hand as he walked; a group round the fountain were throwing its waters back to their source; another sat on a bench and sang for his own pleasure; and there was a small cyclist pedalling madly, his cheeks flushed, his eyes aflame, proud of his speed and of the rose he was carrying between his teeth.



There was a whole form coming out of one of the day schools. They, evidently, had not yet broken up, not yet had their prize-giving. Their term was long, ending on the national fete—July 14th. Georges took pleasure in noting the ways in which they differed from each other—their manner of carrying their satchels, often more whimsically than the ephebi of the Parthenon frieze carried their amphorae; some carried it on their shoulders, some at the nape, on back or bottom, under arms, by the handle, upside down, some leaning forward and others to the side, to balance the weight of their books. And these boys raised their eyes to look at nobody unless, like Georges, at others of their age. From time to time they stopped to exchange words in low, secret voices. They stood for long minutes in front of shop-windows, arguing about everything displayed in them. Or they stopped to watch a car pass. A group halted at a kiosk to buy picture papers. Instantly they were seized by a feverish desire to begin reading. One stopped with a friend on each side pressing close against his shoulders. With his satchel gripped between his legs, he held the paper open, and the three laughed together over what they were reading. A fourth had taken a romantic novel from his satchel. He had reached his own door, but waited before opening it to finish his page, which was making him laugh too.

All these boys, laughing at the same time but at different things, seemed to Georges all the same, although at first they had each seemed different. They were the innocent youth of the romantic novelist: they were also, no doubt, the youth whose innocence

Father de Trennes, in common with St Augustine, had held suspect.

Georges passed his old *lycée*. He wondered whether it would have been better for him had he never been to St Claude's; but he put that thought from him, a single memory was enough to make it seem sacrilege. Apart from Alexander, that year of religious boarding-school had enriched him more than many years as a day-boy at *lycée*. And that, with all respect to the Superior, was not because of daily communion. It was because of the perpetual mixing of the sacred and the profane, which cast a special kind of light on even the most trifling things. It was because of the unending struggle between boys and priests, worthy of comparison with the Christian's struggle against the world. The "intense spiritual life" which one led there in public nourished another kind of life, all the more intense in that it had to be kept very private.

Georges was grateful to his parents now for having sent him away from them: he loved them for having sent him to that college where he had got to know Alexander and learnt to know himself. He had returned from it hurt and uneasy, but fledged, blooded. He had complained of loss of freedom; but that year would have been his first year of freedom.

The evening was happier. He had veered towards a measure of optimism, product of his long walk. The boys he had met with had given him confidence. Alexander was at the satchel-carrying age himself, the age when comic papers can be read, the water of a fountain played with, a rose carried between the teeth. It was an age which denied misfortune, prevented any belief in unhappiness. An age at which, though the passions might be violent, they were still shy. Thus Alexander bid defiance to the world but dared not use the *poste restante* facilities. Besides, as Lucien had pointed out, he had, after all, bowed before certain other necessary constraints proper to his situation. In the incident of his note, and in

the Easter holiday business, he had, on the whole, finally obeyed both the college and the domestic authority. He would do so again, especially since it was now Georges himself who was asking him to do so. He would understand this fresh appeal from his friend, as he had understood that other appeal, in Father Lauzon's room, when he had been inclined to rebel at the idea of asking the Superior's pardon. Yes, he would be strong enough to yield.

And Georges knew Alexander's strength. He recalled Maurice saying that he and his brother were level-headed, and Maurice had proved it in his own case by the manner in which he had reacted to his own tribulations. In March Alexander had faced danger with courage, not giving way until he had put up an obstinate resistance. This time he had not given way, but matters were now so arranged that in the end he would do so. At the same time he must realise that Georges could not simply have shed all his affection, just like that, in a moment. He would know perfectly well what part of their director of conscience's remarks to accept, what to reject.

Georges even extracted some comfort from his knowledge of that priest: the Father was fond of Alexander and would have taken pains to handle the matter gently. Moreover the boy's surroundings were no longer the college. He was free of that cloistered, communal atmosphere in which strong passions became exasperated.

If the notes had already been returned to him, but if he had not yet given Georges' back, was he still keeping these under his pillow? Even if he had destroyed them all, even if he had removed the gold chain which Georges had once kissed from about his neck, he could never destroy what they had been to each other.

He was roused in the morning by a fanfare of trumpets. The garrison was marching past. Father de Trennes had a gentler way of waking people. Georges' mind at once flew to Alexander. The brilliant sunshine was reassuring.

An idea occurred to him: why, before they left on Thursday, should he not go and spend a day at S.? He could surely contrive to meet Alexander, avoiding Father Lauzon; that would be better than writing to him. On the other hand the idea of a letter which should be his great explanation pleased him. Well, he would write, but he would deliver the letter himself. If that proved impossible he would arrange something with Maurice. And if Maurice was not there he would fall back on Blajan who, according to the latest reports, would be reappearing at St Claude's in October.

That prospect pulled Georges up for a moment; it enabled him to estimate how far he had come since Blajan's departure. It looked as if they were to meet again and resume relations even before the new term began. Would Blajan still be interested in one's girl cousins? Georges felt that he would not have patience for very long if he had to answer questions touching the lovely Liliane. Which reminded him that he would be seeing that fair young lady in the country during the autumn, a fact he had forgotten until this moment. He was not likely to be a more agreeable holiday companion for her than for André and Lucien. But the autumn was still distant, they were still at the zenith of the summer which had started so well, and of which Georges had talked to Alexander, on the subject of their respective birthdays. The whole summer would now depend on his visit to S., which was the nearest and most important of its events.

Presently he would announce his project to his parents. It was a trifling journey, but there

would have to be a plausible reason for it. The pretext could be Father Lauzon's fête. Georges could say that, on this occasion, a number of the school's Children of Mary were organising a little ceremony in their confessor's honour, as a token of gratitude for his many kindnesses. (He would thus be making use of the tale he had invented in order to get his parents to choose the same watering-place as Alexander's: he could not, at the time, have imagined that they would actually be choosing the same as Lucien's.) For as long as his family remained at M. it should be possible to repeat this "visit to Father Lauzon" from time to time. The Superior's Rule for the Holidays advised that boys should keep in touch with their confessor. The expedient which had paid such good dividends during the school year, could be made to serve equally profitably during the holidays.

What would the Father's Christian name have to be, to make the excuse plausible? Georges consulted his pocket calendar, and thought of Father Lauzon consulting his, on the eve of the holidays, when laying down his orders. Tomorrow, Saturday, had better be excluded: it was too near; Sunday was Georges' own birthday. Next Thursday they were going away and in any case it was the feast of St Marguerite, which was hardly suitable. Between Monday, July 17th, then, and Wednesday, July 19th, he had a choice of SS Alexis, Camille and Vincent. Georges opted for Alexis: the name was appropriate to the occasion in that it recalled Alexander's, the eclogue of Virgil, and the conversation in the hut, the last they had had. A sweet vengeance, indeed, to baptise the terrible Lauzon with the name of Alexis!

Georges went downstairs and found his father reading the papers. Nothing about the St Claude's prize-giving had yet appeared, although an account of it usually had the privilege

of appearing in the local Catholic paper. An open telegram lay on the table: the reply from the hotel. Their rooms were reserved; they had been lucky.

Georges seized the opportunity to make his request: his tale of St Alexis' day went over very well. He would leave on Monday morning and return in the evening. He kissed his father with the same affectionate effusion as he had displayed on the day he had allowed Georges to handle the gold stater of Alexander. He was delighted with the idea of his journey to S. He stood in front of the piano and tried to pick out the tune of "Blonde reveuse" with one finger.

He went out into the garden, sliding down the polished stone banister from the terrace. It was a long time since he had done anything of the kind; not since he had been a mere child, like those he had seen yesterday, amusing himself with a group of playmates. But now he could not have borne to have even a single companion. One who was absent peopled the garden. When Georges had last evoked his image in this same place, one morning in the Easter holidays, the conservatory was sweetly perfumed with the scent of wistaria and hyacinth, and he had a letter from his friend in his pocket. Like the letter, wistaria and hyacinths had vanished, but there were other flowers in the garden, other flowers to speak to him of Alexander.

Lilacs, grouped in a formal bed, presented him with a new symbol. For these were the flowers which Virgil had presented to Alexis: "Come, lovely boy, see how, for you, nymphs have brought baskets full of lilies."

Georges picked one of the lilies. He would put it among the roses in his room. The immaculate lily should replace the red gladiolus which Alexander had thrown to him that

day at the river, and which had concluded its life in the school chapel. Thus the colours of the Holy Virgin's bouquet were reversed.

Georges announced that he would not be going out that afternoon. He had numerous letters to write. He must advise his friends at S. to expect him on Monday—notably Marc de Blajan, who would be pleased to see him again, and Maurice Motier, the son of a doctor. He was at once sorry that he had uttered the name of Motier before his parents—it was a name which, in his family environment, should for ever have remained his own secret, even when qualified by a Christian name other than the one which really belonged to it. To avoid any questions about it, and to drown its echo in their minds, he immediately began to talk about Lucien, to whom he also proposed to write. He would tell him about the telegram from the hotel, and what time to expect them on Thursday.

He locked himself into his room, as he did whenever he wanted to be alone with his image of Alexander. For it was to him that he really proposed to write, and to him only. He had not yet made up his mind whether to post the letter to Maurice the following day; or to wait until Monday and follow the plan he had worked out that morning. It seemed to him cruel to leave his friend in such uncertainty for several more days; but he could not forget that it was indispensable to do so. It was fated that he should never have any choice of means.

He propped the boy's two notes against the vase of flowers on his table, and placed the lock of hair beside them. He drew up an easy-chair, but then felt that he was too comfortable, recalling the moral refinements associated with the distribution of easy-chairs and ordinary chairs in Father Lauzon's room. So serious a letter as he had to write

demanded the austerity of an ordinary chair. He had shut the windows, not wanting to be disturbed by noises from outside. He sat, for a few moments, quite still, his eyes shut, collecting his thoughts, calling up a vision of the face which he would associate hereafter with the scent of lilies and roses, as elsewhere he had linked it with the scent of lilac. He no longer believed that his breach with Alexander would be lasting. The despair which had overwhelmed him after the first and the last verdict from Father Lauzon now seemed to him excessive. He fell back upon Lucien's way of thinking: this was all a passing trial; a friendship like his and Alexander's could never perish.

He began to write:

*You whom I love,*

*I want you to know that I love you. I want you to be absolutely certain that it was this feeling which inspired everything I have done. My only guide has been my love, helped by my reason.*

*I have given them all your notes, or almost all. I have betrayed you and, in a way, denied you, but it was in order to contrive our salvation in this world, if not in the next as you have been told. You must believe that I had need of more courage to take that decision and thus prevent you from coming to fetch me, than I should have needed to keep my word and go away with you. I had welcomed your project with enthusiasm, but afterwards I began to think about it; and you must let me say that I owed it to myself to think for you, since you had not done so. We had not the right to involve ourselves in such a mad plan,*

splendid though it was. To which I must add that we had not the power to do it, either. The success of our flight became problematical from the moment it was no longer a secret; and even if we had succeeded in getting away, how long would it have lasted, and what must have been its consequences? We were within our rights in dreaming our dream; but not in trying to realise it. We are, at our age, dependent on everyone, as you well know, and our subjection would have been no less for a change of scene.

The holidays, certainly, are lost to us, but the future remains intact. So that I can, without blushing, confirm what I said in my last note, having kept your own last one. Have faith in me as I have in you, and let us be patient. Our sacrifice will not have been in vain. I put my trust in destiny. Our enemy's—enemies'—victory is apparent only, and temporary. It is we who are the real victors, since we have lost nothing of our true empire, and have not ceased to reign over it. The day will come when nobody will try to wrest it from us, for on that day we shall be reunited and nothing shall part us again. You will not have been the friend of all my college years, but you will be the friend of all my other years. And all that I may possess will be yours—I shall possess it only for you.

In that I shall be doing no more than return you your own; for am I not the first of my possessions and did not you make me such as I am? You have recreated my whole being better than it was done by my father and my mother. The vision of your face has watched over my studies. All of beauty which I have found in the poets or in the Church's prayers, all that I have loved in the Greeks and Romans, I have dedicated to you, it was for your sake, because of you, that I loved these things. Those minutes during which I could see and hear you have been my eternity, because you were there in your year of splendour, so

*also were perfection and delights. You were the hidden grain of myrrh which perfumed the college, the grain of incense which burnt for me only, the speck of gold which, whenever I saw you smile, enriched me. Ceremonies at St Claude's were nothing but hymns to our happiness. We have stored up joys enough to fill whole books and enchant several centuries. And if, notwithstanding this, we find our way tedious during our separation, let us be sustained by the certainty that we shall soon, and thenceforth to the end, continue it together.*

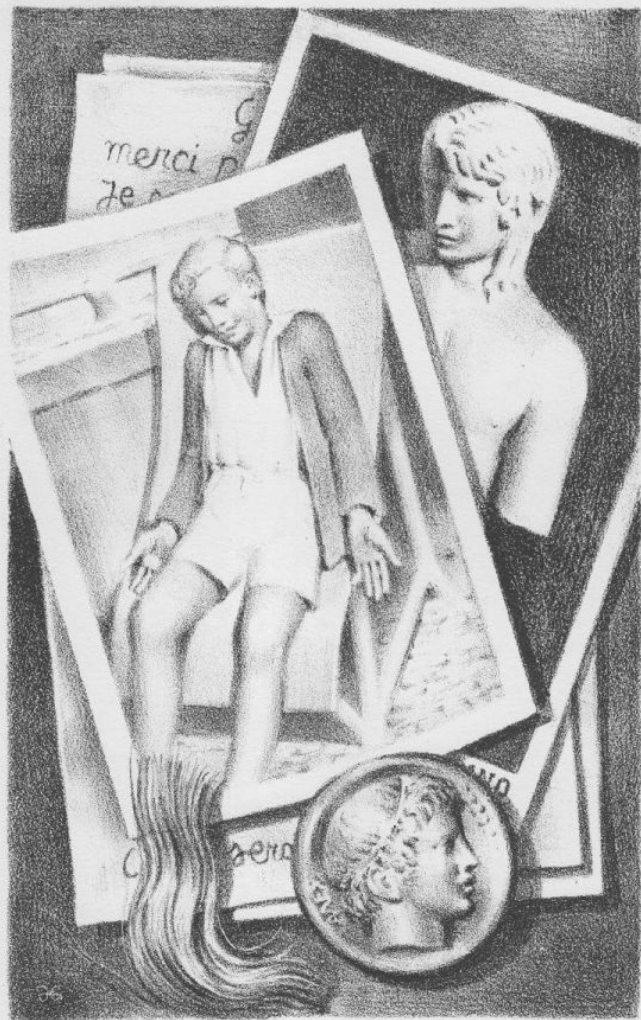
*I am writing this letter on Friday, July 14th, and on Monday I shall go to S., bringing it to you. The very idea of the journey intoxicates me. I shall see your street, your house. I shall watch for you to come out. I shall feel as if I am still at St Claude's, watching, at the door of the conservatory, for you to appear. But I shall have to be sharply on the watch for another person, too, the man who is the cause of all our troubles but who will not have the last word.*

*I can hardly hope that you will at once welcome me with open arms as if nothing had happened. But I expect a good deal from the impression this letter should make on you in vindicating me, for it is written with the blood of my soul. This mute but irrefutable evidence must convince you. It is not designed to modify the notes from me which you already have, but to complete them. Or, if your anger has already destroyed them, or if you, too, have been forced to give them up, then to replace them.*

*It is possible that I shall not see you at all. Possible, too, that you refuse to take this message from me if you do. In that case I shall give it to Maurice—he is already forewarned—or another of my old form-mates, whom doubtless you know, Marc Blajan.*

*Write me as soon as possible (at the—Hotel). I am anxious to be sure that all the clouds have been blown away.*

*The friendship which was so dear to us is in your hands, after having been in mine. But you cannot want to destroy it, any more than I could have done: it is bigger than either of us, and stronger. As I have already said about our fate, we are entitled to put our trust in it. It can laugh at these trials, for it has been tried and proved. It cannot suffer failure because of our separation, for it is ever present to our hearts, in which our blood was mingled. Nor can it suffer from the passage of time, since for each of us the other will have the face we knew at St Claude's. Because of it we are already living together, for all we are parted. Realise, if you have hitherto avoided knowing this, that the proper name of our friendship is love.*



The next day, while Georges was finishing his breakfast, his parents came into his room. “You’re in the paper at last,” his father said, “with the accounts of the July 14th ceremonies.”

And kissing him his mother said:

“Your birthday isn’t till tomorrow, but we didn’t want to make you wait till then for our present—you’ve earned it by your success.”

And using the folded newspaper as a tray, she presented him with a small open casket in which lay a very handsome signet ring. Georges thanked them, and kissed them both again. He counted the pearls in the crest, and checked that the number of twigs in the family coat of arms was correct. He slipped the ring onto his finger and amused himself for a moment judging its effect. He would make Alexander try it on, if he managed to see him on Monday. Better still, he would give it to him. It would consecrate their mystic union. Alexander would wear it at night, as he slept. Georges would say that he had lost it during the journey. He could do well enough without a ring: the flaming twigs would have been no more than a straw fire.

When he was alone again, he stretched out happily on the couch, prepared to read the article in which his name figured so brilliantly, as brilliantly as the ring shone on his finger.

*The prize-giving at St Claude's this year was a particularly brilliant occasion. His Eminence the Cardinal-Archbishop of M. honoured the ceremony with his presence. The reading of the list of distinctions and prize-winners—the principal names we print below—was preceded by a speech made by M. le Supérieur, and filled the morning. The afternoon was dedicated to the artbf the drama: Richard Cœur de Lion, a short play tastefully performed by the youngest pupils, and the great Racine's Les Plaideurs, in which their seniors demonstrated their wit and distinction. The numerous spectators of this long feast of reason and flow of wit found it all too short. Our congratulations to the boys who, accompanied by their parents and comforted by His Eminence's blessing, have said good-bye to their beloved college—good-bye until they return from excellent holidays.*

Georges smiled; the Superior's style was unmistakable. It was signed, if by nothing else, by that "excellent holidays"; and at least one alexandrine had slipped into the text.

This was followed by the baccalaureate results—valuable propaganda; then came the major college prizes (Old Boys' Association cup, etc.). Then the prizes for excellence and diligence in each class. Georges saw his own name appear twice. He must cut out this column; it was the first time he had had access to this kind of publicity; the *lycée* did not print its pupils' names in newspapers. And he could not avoid feeling rather proud of himself.

Even more than he had done at St Claude's, he felt himself born for honours and distinctions. Alexander would read this account during the morning; and even if yesterday's

interviews had been stormy, he would be moved when he read his friend's name, as that friend had been on reading his, embellishing the list of *accessits*.

Never had Georges taken so much pleasure in a newspaper; he, who was accustomed to cast them down as containing nothing of interest, was grateful to this one for printing his name, and so drawing his friend's attention to him. This little chronicle of success would put things right for him.

So that everything appearing in such a paper seemed to him worthy of attention. Beneath its title-head he read: "Saturday, July 15th. St Henri's." He would have liked that day's saint to be George, or Alexander, Lucien or Claude. But those saints' days were all passed, and the only one of interest to come was St Alexis'. Georges cast his eye over the articles on other pages, and came to the *Miscellaneous News* on the reverse of the page carrying the prize-giving account. He began to read it and instantly it seemed as if his heart had stopped beating. The following lines burned their way into his eyes.

### BOY POISONS HIMSELF BY ACCIDENT

S., July 14th.

*Yesterday afternoon Alexander Motier, 12½, swallowed a violent poison which he had mistaken for a medicine. Attempts to save the unfortunate boy, victim of his own fatal mistake, were unsuccessful.*

Georges raised his eyes and looked about him, as if he doubted the reality of what he

saw. Everything was in its usual place: the “Blue Boy” and the “Red Boy” in their respective frames, the unmade bed, his jacket thrown over the back of an armchair, the vase of flowers in the centre of the table, near his breakfast tray, the china cup with a little froth of chocolate on the edge, and the empty grapefruit skin with the spoon still in it.

Georges looked at the newspaper again. What he had just read was still there. It was the most important of the short news items, given pride of place above “A fraudulent banker” and “Motorbike versus car”. And there, still, on the other side of the page, was the prize-giving, the Cardinal’s blessing, the promise of excellent holidays, Georges’ own name under the heading of excellence and diligence, and Alexander’s name as well. The two items of news echoed each other. It was as if each had been made to wait for the other, so that they should not be parted. Behind the laurels of St Claude’s rose that single, slender cypress. And comedy had given way to tragedy.

Georges rose, letting the newspaper slip to the floor. He went slowly towards the door and locked it. He wanted to be alone, for the last time, with Alexander.

The moment he thus felt himself ensured against intrusion, the inconceivable news flamed out at him with blinding clarity.

“God, how stupid! How stupid!” he sobbed, and falling into a chair, he covered his face with his hands. For a long time he wept, he who, on the eve of the holidays, had held that in the face of excessive misfortune, tears were ludicrous. Never had he gone down into such an abyss within himself. He could have wished to and unawareness, unconsciousness in those depths, rather than the sharp consciousness which harrowed him. Little by little, a thought, an idea, was forcing its way through his grief: it was that Alexander had not poisoned himself

by accident, but deliberately—that he had died because of him, Georges.

This conviction checked his tears. “July 14th . . . yesterday afternoon . . .” That is, the 13th, the day Georges’ letter had reached Father Lauzon, and the priest had struck his great blow. A blow to which the boy had riposted by striking one of his own.

Thus, then, the ordinary warp and weft of college life—lessons, prep, prayers; between one Retreat and another, between the ceremony of the lamb and the story of the lizards, the “Map of Love” and the *Life of the Virtuous Decalogue*, Richepin’s poems, and the line of the *Imitation*, Academy and Congregation, Father de Trennes and the Bishop of Pergamum—had been weaving into a suicide. This was the conclusion to assignations in the conservatory, the notes, kisses and hopes of friendship.

“The unfortunate boy, victim of his own fatal mistake . . .” The words seemed to express a tragic irony. The fatal mistake had been Georges’, Lucien’s, the priest’s; Alexander had been their victim. Rose-water, holy water and the rest of their medicines had turned into poison.

Georges and his confessor had come to terms in a very final manner. By means of their combined efforts Alexander Motier was no more. There had been talk of giving back the boy to God: they had done so. But the boy had, by his act, left them proof—to the priest that he despised the laws in whose name he had been persecuted; to Georges, that he had only lived for him. To use his own words, he had loved him more than life itself.

During which time, what had Georges been doing for his friend? He had sacrificed four pages of his prize volumes, kept back two of the notes, picked a lily, and written a letter. And on the day when Alexander died thinking of the face of one who had lied to him,

Georges had walked the town to get free of the vision of a face which had never lied. That garland of faces he had composed had been a wreath to lay upon a coffin.

Once again he had driven someone out, but not this time merely from college. He had done this to the one he had been seeking, from the first day of the first term, even through Lucien's friendship; the one whom nobody would ever equal, the most beautiful being in the whole world, as he was the most charming, the most intelligent, the noblest. Yes, Georges de Sarre had every right to his bit of publicity. Under two different headings the newspaper was telling him some home truths. He was the victor, public and private. He had borne off the first prizes, distinguished himself in his part, deserved the applause, well merited the congratulations.

Should he not pay for this death with his own? Death called to death, as love to love. Alexander had set off alone; but Georges was free to join him if he would. Nobody had been able to prevent Alexander from setting out. The tie which united them was not yet quite broken, and Georges could strengthen it with a new knot. He had contributed a great many words: it was open to him now to contribute a single deed. But words and deeds were as nought in the face of the boy's silent answer. When they had returned from the Easter holidays, their exchange had been of the same order—a poem against an open vein. Now, once again, Alexander had set the example. Was love nothing but a game? Right, then so was death.

Georges lay down on his bed, frightened by the spectacle of himself lucid yet making a decision to take his own life.

He would have liked to know what poison Alexander had used, so as to use the same.

But probably it was some rare substance that only doctors could get. Georges could not remember that the medicine cupboard in their own bathroom included a single phial or bottle with a sinister label. If he wanted to get it over at once, this morning, he would have to find some other means. He put aside the idea of using a revolver; he had no idea how to use that weapon, though there was one locked in his father's desk-drawer. Besides, he shrank from the idea of so violent a death; nothing forbade him to make his death a gentle one. It was enough that he would die.

He would open an artery in the bath. No form of suicide was, according to what he had read, more agreeable. He had looked upon Father de Trennes' catastrophe as if it had been an historical scene: he would now consummate his own catastrophe with a scene not less "historical"—worthy of that antiquity he loved. But his scene would go beyond mere ostracism, to an imitation of the Petronius of *Quo Vadis*? It would be the apotheosis of that red colour which had started with his tie and remained the special colour of his friendship. He had seen it the colour of love, but it was the colour of blood, that blood of which he had spilled a drop for Alexander's sake, and would now spill the rest. Their special sign to the very end would in truth be the blood of the Lamb. Their sins had not been as scarlet, but Georges' expiation would be. Alexander, talking of Hyacinth and of St Hyacinth, had said that it seemed he shed his blood for the two religions. Georges would shed his for a third, the religion of love his letter had been full of, and for which his turn had come to testify. His penultimate letter had, by his own account, been written with his soul's blood; the last message should be written with his body's.

He took pleasure in this vision of his imminent end, which would bring him closer to

Alexander. Like Nisus and Euryale, or ephebi in battle, they would have died for each other. The boy would have kept his promise, and Georges his vow.

He would take care to destroy all that remained to him of Alexander—the lock of hair and the two notes. The short note of leave-taking he would leave for his family would contain no explanation. Unlike Racine, he had no will to make. His parents would attribute his suicide to neurasthenia, growing-pains, overwork, boarding-school. But they would call it an accident so that he could be buried with the proper religious rites. Probably Alexander would have had the benefit of those same rites.

The secret of his heart would thus have been preserved. Even had he left the notes behind him, what connection could they make between his death and words which were a clarion call to live? And if they had known of his project to run away, why should they think he should have wanted to die before trying to carry it out? Not even Maurice knew enough to make out the whole story; besides, his own preoccupations were not such as to leave him any inclination to try. And there would, henceforth, be no obstacle to his love affairs with servant girls. He would soon forget his little brother. Only Lucien and Father Lauzon would know the whole story. Georges would write to them, in Alexander's name and his own, so that they could have no doubt about it.

Lucien already knew that to make a small cut in your arm and exchange a drop of blood with another was no vain gesture. He had been the first to tell Georges that it was something to be taken seriously—but even he would hardly have believed how seriously. Recently, it is true, he had reasoned with Georges; but he had once said that one could face anything if one had a real friend. He would now have something to talk about—a pair of true friends who

had faced a good deal. He would propagate the witness they had borne, would become the interpreter of their story, the apostle of their faith. That would be his chance to expiate his light-mindedness, and at the same time to rediscover, in the cause of brotherhood, that neophyte's zeal which he had once demonstrated in the cause of several brotherhoods. He would ask his former neighbour's parents for a mourning picture; but it would not be simply part of a collection, like the one he had been given last year.

As for the promoter of the tragedy, he could easily be confounded by a quotation of his own words. Was what he had done an example of teaching boys to live prudently? But perhaps the tragedy was just one of those coincidences he found pleasure in admiring. Marc de Blajan had fallen ill after refusing to join the Congregation, Alexander had died after leaving it, and Georges after making fun of it. One might, perhaps, also point out to him that his two penitents were, according to Church doctrine, damned, an indifferent result for their director of conscience to contemplate, but a result which would add a twenty-fourth to M. Hamon's twenty-three reasons for humility. He might—who could be sure?—bring up the rear by killing himself in remorse and disappointment.

Georges began to think of the manner in which Alexander's death and his own would be presented to their masters and schoolfellows at St Claude's.

If their deaths were supposed natural, then soft-heartedness and sympathy would prevail. The Superior would, in that case, attribute an elevated meaning to the note whose text had become known to him. Its inspiration would appear to him to be not a cheap novel, but *The Song of Songs*. During his own excellent holidays he would compose a funeral panegyric for his academician, and an elegy in honour of the boy who had carried the lamb. He would

speak of them during meditation. God, he would say, had wanted to draw the whole school's attention to the idea of death, by calling to Himself one of the most brilliant boys in senior school, and one of the most lovable in junior school. Their sacramental assiduity and the frequency of their communions would be held up as an example. He would express the hope that the merit of their actions must have sustained them in their last moments; and the opinion that the bread of the strong had nourished them. They would almost be regarded as little saints, like Father de Trennes', or the Dominican's. So that even beyond the grave Georges would be converting others, unless, indeed, he became the cause of perverting them—for the idea of death might well be an encouragement to enjoy life while you had it.

Father de Trennes, if he heard of the event, was not the man to be edified by it. But even if he had no doubt that it was Georges who had informed on him, he would be ready to agree that Heaven, in meting out justice, was rather overdoing it. He, at least, and Maurice, were alive to show that that same justice could manifest itself in a more encouraging manner. To which saint would the Father commend the souls of Georges and Alexander? Doubtless he would quote them as examples to his nephews; interrogate the pure skies of Greece as to their purity; pick the petals from a rose in memory of their faces; read a few lines of Theognis; smoke an Egyptian cigarette; and finally, sew black crepe onto their pyjamas no longer dedicated to the Olympian, but to the Psycho-pompean Hermes.

Father Lauzon, however, would be the real accomplice of the two for whose deaths he was responsible. Should he conclude that he, in his turn, was now obliged to lie, he would be forced to commend them to the prayers of the Congregation, though the prayers he would be reciting in his heart of hearts would, perhaps, be more to the point. The intention of his

masses would be for Georges and Alexander. There would, of course, be a special service held for them shortly after the beginning of term; in addition, on the eve of the next long vacation, they would not be forgotten when it came to the Old Boys' Association Mass. That ceremony had found both of them, this year, in circumstances such that neither of them ever seemed likely to become members of the Association; yet henceforth they would play their part in its celebrations for ever—by joining the ranks of deceased Old Boys.

Lucien would not keep the secret: what would they think to whom he told it? And what would he himself think of it? Would he not be horrified to realise that for a whole year he had been cheek by jowl with such a tragedy, a double tragedy? Or might he not, rather, smile to see the two friends being turned into angels? He would take his part, as reservedly as Father Lauzon, in the public prayers for the unhappy pair; but if anyone prayed for them regardless of knowing the real facts, it might be him.

And he might be the only one; for if Father Lauzon, unwilling to countenance yet another sacrilege, proclaimed the truth, their memory would be accursed. Blajan would be sure that, since they had been suddenly cast down, it must have been because they were impure, and would congratulate himself on having steered clear of any such pernicious attachment. Without going so far, perhaps, as to imitate the worthy Maurice, he would love his girl cousin all the more fervently.

Then, during the Retreat, the subject of special friendships would be dealt with in profound lectures and sermons. There would be no need to seek horrifying examples in the history of the Terror or in the lives of the saints. The Superior would make much of the personal warnings he had given to the wretched heroes of the summer holidays, and would

recall the advice which the Dominican preacher had given them all. He might also decide that it would be as well to talk less, and allow less talk, of Divine love, the spirit of love, love of the Well-Beloved; and he might revise the list of works for refectory reading, and the list of hymns. He would wonder whether he ought not to be more moderate in his expressions; whether boys were not apt to translate into the language of the senses what was intended for their souls; whether, for fear of shocking them, one might not be encouraging them to do the shocking. He would re-read his statistics in a new light, and revise his interpretation of those figures. At the next Eucharistic Congress he would recommend that communion be administered to boys with unconsecrated species, as a measure of prudence. In the same spirit, in order to avoid giving rise to perjury, Robert the Pious administered oaths over a reliquary from which the relics had been removed.

The Religious Instruction master would point out that suicides cannot be buried with religious rites or in consecrated ground, even though, by virtue of tolerance or fraud, the two impious boys in question might have received those benefits. And suicide would be moved to the top of the list of cases where such rites are forbidden. Thus Georges and Alexander would, like Voltaire and Moliere, find their last resting-place denied them. They would be stricken out of the Congregation.

There would be no memorial mass at St Claude's, where they had attended so many masses in common. They would be officially banished from the Chapel where their friendship had been born and which they had scented with their lavender. But nothing could stop them from returning there as they pleased. They would do so, and no longer face to face, but side by side. Even if they did not attend those masses, they would all be for them. The

masses in black would be theirs because they were dead to this world through the fault of a priest. The masses in white would be theirs because they had remained pure; the masses in red, colour of their love and of their blood; the masses in violet, like the one during which Alexander had censured Georges; the masses in gold, for one had had golden hair and the other a single golden lock. Even masses in green would be theirs, because they had hoped. For it was not in despair that they had taken their lives.

Not in despair: for, in that instant, and by the light of his feelings, Georges was sure that Alexander had not rejected him; the boy had seen himself parted from his friend by the force of circumstances, and the inhumanity of men, and he had died as the only way of being free to join him, as Georges was about to die for the same reason.

Together they would explore both past and future. They would transport themselves back into those times when Hyacinth had his own priests; it would make a nice change of priests. Henceforth and throughout eternity they would be meeting each other in unknown hearts and places. Their story was not confined within the limits of their college, or their homes, or their names. They would have being under other names, in other colleges, and other homes. They would exist as long as there were boys on earth, and as long as there was beauty.

The farther Georges let his imagination wander, the more clearly did he begin to perceive another idea: the idea that he was dramatising himself and would not, in fact, actually kill himself. His acceptance of death had been no less spontaneous than his acceptance of the plan to run away, but the embellishing tricks of his reasoning mind had unmasked him. His resolve to die had been sincere, but behind that resolve had, no doubt, lurked the assurance that this was only a mental attitude. For as Lucien had said, there are

things one can do, and things one cannot do. And Georges realised very well that he would not do what Alexander had done.

He came, then, to considering not the accomplished act, but its results: his friend had been sublime—but for nothing. Having begun by admiring him, Georges progressed to blaming him for having tom himself away from life, destroyed all his gifts and all his perfections because of a false idea; just as he had blamed him when, in defiance, he had revealed their plan to Father Lauzon. The friendship which had united them belonged to them mutually, and neither had the right to ruin the other's happiness for ever.

Soon, however, these thoughts seemed to Georges as wanting in taste as they were superfluous. He would give this disaster an explanation which had occurred to him during his last evening in college, the evening during which the idea of Alexander killing himself had crossed his mind. Both the boy and himself had, each in his own way, been brought under the law of Necessity. Each had done no more than follow his destiny. Neither decision nor action had really been theirs. It was written that Alexander must perish, as if he were too beautiful for this world. The joys which Georges had promised himself were not proper to man's estate. He had read as much, or heard such things said, but had dismissed them as fables. It had been given to him to verify them.

His memory now revealed omens which he had noted, unconsciously, but without understanding. He thought of the most recent: the palmistry business; the blond lock of hair, cut off by the barber; the scar which had disappeared; the Virgilian Lots on the eve of the holidays; and, on the first day of the holidays, the cloud of steam which had hidden Alexander as he walked away. All very silly, very trifling, but it had a meaning.

Georges got up and took the lily out of the vase and set it on one side. He had picked the flower because he saw in it a symbol of Alexander, but at the time he had done so Alexander was already dead. Now he recalled Lucien's figure of speech: the boy had faded like a lily leaving nought but a ghost of perfume.

Next, as carefully as he had cut out the four pages from his prize books, Georges removed from the newspaper the page which bore, like the obverse and reverse of the same medal, Alexander's name backed by his own. He put the page into his cupboard, perceiving as he did so the documents which it completed: there was the notebook into which he had copied

Alexander's notes, the exercise-book containing his "Portrait of a Friend", and the letter he had written to Alexander yesterday—the only letter he had ever written to him, which would have prevented the disaster, but which the boy must by now have read in another world. Georges had hoped to see him on Monday, but now would see only his grave—a monument but little resembling the one he had dreamt of during the last holidays. The flowers which he would place upon it would no longer be flowers of rhetoric: but they would still be red.

Georges' clock chimed the hour and drew his attention to the fact that it was getting late. He must dress, take his bath—a bath of warm water, not blood. He took off the ring which he had intended to give to Alexander, and put it away into its box. He would not wear it again; touching the newspaper it had been tainted with death. The idea of going to S. at once, today, crossed his mind; the funeral had probably not yet taken place; he might get there before Alexander had completely vanished. But what would be the use of making such an

appearance, only to have to keep out of sight, or give rise to astonishment?

Combing his hair, Georges, without thinking, made use of lavender water. He was ashamed, then, of using that scent; yet, after all, Alexander had been fond of it. That idea governed the rest of his dressing. He chose a blue shirt; Alexander had preferred his blue shirts. Instead of a light summer suit, he put on his St Claude's Sunday suit. He hesitated over the choice of a tie. Black suggested itself, but he would have had to borrow one from his father and gave up the idea, for he would have had to explain his mourning. The idea of being questioned was repugnant to him, and he was more determined than ever to keep his secret. Besides, what he wanted to commemorate even in the most trifling details was not Alexander's death, but his life. He put on his red tie—was not red the colour of mourning for the Pope? And, after all, he did wear his ring. He was fostering every illusion, indulging himself in fantasies, while his whole soul was drowned in grief.

At luncheon he ate hardly anything and was forced to admit that he was tired. His parents talked of his needing a holiday and the fortunate choice of the Pyrenees. They showed anxiety as to whether his extras, at meals, had been adequate during the last term at school.

A telegram arrived in the middle of the meal. From the hotel again? But it was addressed to Georges—the first telegram he had ever received. It was awkward to have to read it at table, knowing as he did that it must be concerned with Alexander. He opened it, agitated but trying to control his expression. It might be from Father Lauzon who, indeed, could have shown more haste to get in touch with him; or perhaps from Alexander's parents, who might have found the notes.

It was from Lucien.

*With you with all my heart. Forgive me.*

Georges must still go on feigning, juggling with words, playing a part.

“Rouvère sends congratulations,” he said, and read the telegram aloud.

“Congratulations?”

“Yes. He’ll have read the newspaper, and also remembered my birthday. My friends are as thoughtful as my parents.”

“But why ask you to forgive him?”

“I imagine that refers to a bet which, when we were in the train, gave rise to a quarrel—a bet that *Les Plaideurs* would not be mentioned by the paper. Lucien is a bit odd sometimes.”

He was sorry for himself, for having to talk such nonsense; and equally sorry that he could not believe in it.

At last came the relief of being alone; his parents were going out together. But he could settle to nothing, could not decide whether to go out or stay at home. His room, the house, filled him with horror.

He went out into the garden. Among the lilies he could see the truncated stalk of the one he had picked. He sat down. His vision of having the boy here, with him, in the garden, was over and done with. Sitting within a few yards of the conservatory where he had put flowers into Alexander’s letter, he thought again of the news which he had just received. Lucien, obviously, had not doubted that Alexander’s death had been due to suicide, and was sorry

for the advice he had given Georges, as he had been sorry for telling him about the gardener's hut. He had said that Alexander would not kill himself—"An unpleasant quarter of an hour to get through, that's all." His "that's all" must have recurred to him when he saw the news.

Georges had already been blaming Lucien; by putting some of the responsibility onto him, he diminished his own. Yet had Lucien's advice really been any different from his own ulterior intentions, the intentions hidden behind the ostensible ones? He had acted in real friendship, pleading the cause of real life, the real future.

No, the real culprit was the priest who had been the instrument of the boy's death. He it was who, in the name of goodness, had done so much evil. Georges began to think, with a kind of ferocious joy, of the letter he would presently be writing. Different though it would be from the one he had imagined that morning, it would still cut like a whip-lash. It would announce not his approaching death, but a life devoted to avenging Alexander. There was no longer any question of the penitent being afraid of his confessor: they had exchanged roles.

A servant came to tell Georges that a master from St Claude's was waiting for him in the drawing-room. He did not need to ask which master. The man had come in person to meddle with his grief! Yet he had come, perhaps, thinking to break the news himself, and deserved that Georges should make an exception and forgo his solitude. But Georges felt an almost overwhelming repugnance at the idea of seeing the priest. Moreover he was afraid that he would not dare to say as much as he would have written. He hesitated, wanted to tell the servant to say that he was out. But Alexander might have confided some message for him to

the man whom their ill-fortune had set to dog their footsteps to the bitter end. This consideration being decisive, Georges slowly opened the drawing-room door: his eyes and the priest's met.

Father Lauzon came towards him with outstretched hands. But Georges could not clasp, could not touch them. He turned away and sank down into an armchair, overwhelmed by the man's presence, as he had been overwhelmed when he read the newspaper that morning.

His ideas of revenge had all vanished. Beside the quality of the boy he would have been trying to avenge, everything else seemed trivial, without significance. Could Alexander's death be paid for by anything whatsoever? Georges evoked the boy's living image, not the idea of his death. The silence between the Father and himself grew long; the twilight of the room, its curtains drawn, seemed full of things to which they appeared to listen, and attend. Once again Georges' eyes filled with tears; but much as he had wept of late, there was no relief in it for him. The feeling to which he was giving way, and the refinements with which he had embellished it, redeemed nothing. What calmed him now was an atrocious despair. And he was ashamed at shedding tears before a man whom he had formerly tried to dupe with tears. He was ashamed of his red tie and his new ring. He was ashamed of himself.

His guest, who had crossed to stand facing him, seized his opportunity and said, "However much you are suffering, my pain is greater. I loved the boy more than you did."

Georges was impressed by the gravity of his manner, and by the words themselves. Might not the Father's feelings be equal, in their way, to his own? And might not their mutual reproaches likewise cancel each other out?: for Georges, Alexander had died because this priest existed; and, for the priest, because Georges existed. Moreover, did not the priest hold

a mandate, as he himself had claimed, from a family, and a religion, to which, for better or worse, Alexander had belonged? He had the right to call for a reckoning. He had made a mistake, but it was because he had been deceived. What had happened convicted the steps he had taken, but vindicated the fears which had led him to take them.

Guessing that Georges was now better disposed to listen to him, he resumed, in a voice as low as, formerly, Father de Trennes' in the dormitory, "It was the day before yesterday. We were to meet at three o'clock. I gave him what you sent me. He stood motionless with the papers in his hand. Then, coldly, took out his wallet and from it took other notes; I recognised your handwriting. He gave them to me, with those I had just given him, and left me without having uttered a single word.

"Wishing to comfort him, and also to know where he was going, for this scene had taken place in my house, I followed him and saw him go into his own house. He locked himself into his room. I waited in vain and, after a while, withdrew. I suggested that he should not be allowed out, saying that he needed rest. And I prayed God to help him get through this trial, as you have done. Two hours later I was urgently summoned: he had been found, lying on the floor in his father's consulting-room. He had been killed instantly by a poison."

The priest was silent for a few moments, as if out of respect for the dead. Then he went on, "Heaven send that he was the victim of a mistake, as they have said! He was perhaps only trying to drug himself. But if he did take his own life, for reasons which you and I are in a position to presume, then we must leave judgment of the deed to the Divine mercy. It cannot be that a boy for whose salvation so many tears were shed, so many prayers offered up, is lost. He must, in his last moments, have seen the true light, and been forgiven."

After another silence, Father Lauzon added, "The funeral was this morning, since it could not be tomorrow, a Sunday. The circumstances hastened on a ceremony which, in any case, there was every reason to hold discreetly. I did not send to let you know, for your arrival would have given rise to comment. I had to put Maurice off—he told me that he had, for a short time, been aware of your intrigue. But neither he, nor their parents, suspected the truth, which remains between God and ourselves. I might say, I think, that I represented you at his funeral, if my own grief had not been all that I could bear. I can tell you, now, that I had hoped to guide the boy towards the sacred ministry. He was made for it, made to reveal and communicate the eternal beauties.

"Since this misfortune is greater than human foresight could foresee, we must seek consolations of a higher order in our souls: your friend's death, although it may have been such that it must be condemned, has withdrawn him from the danger of the worst of sins. He was in the way of it, but his truly angelic quality was still safe. His guarantee is in the Apostle's 'The pure shall see God'. I was ruthless because I was defending his purity, when he was at a critical age. The devil is more dangerous at morning than at noon. He was the author of this tragedy; but it is God who has triumphed."

This long speech brought Georges something like complete calm. He had no faith in this balm, yet felt its soothing effect. He recognised ideas of his own, even some of Father de Trennes', in the priest's words. Notably, he was pleased with the idea of Alexander's purity. But just as Father de Trennes' zeal for purity had, as it seemed to Georges, not excluded other preoccupations, so he, himself, had loved Alexander himself more than his purity.

Father Lauzon held out two envelopes.

“Here are the notes you wrote, and those you received. As I promised, I have not read them. If I now have no hesitation in returning them to you, it is because you now know what all this has cost.”

Georges accepted the envelopes: the secrets of his friendship were returning to him intact, but from beyond the grave. The Father next handed him a small, glossy snapshot.

“I am also giving you this,” he said, simply.

The photograph showed Alexander asleep in a deck-chair; he looked even more charming than when sleeping in the train on the way home for the Easter holidays. It was possible to pick out the line of his eyes, the almost straight eyebrows, the curve of his lips, his small, pearly ears, the curls of his hair, composing a still but joyous dance in honour of his beauty. His hands lay open, as if awaiting the clasp of other hands.

Georges raised his eyes to Father Lauzon: he now had proof that this man really had loved Alexander.

“I amused myself taking this photograph during the Christmas holidays,” the Father said. “At that time nothing had yet passed into his eyes or his heart to disturb them. He was as he had been on the day of his first communion. He had been server at my midnight mass. His only pride was in goodness. This is the boy you must keep in your memory. His closed eyes will remind you of the college bed-time prayer—‘Sleep is the image of death . . .’ And you will also remember that it was in awakening to the life of the passions that he died.”

The Father rose: he had colleagues to see and was leaving that evening after dinner. Crossing the room towards the door, he halted by the antique censer, which lay upon a cabinet, and touched it with the tips of his fingers. It was as if, by that simple gesture, he was

restoring to the true cult all that had been turned aside from it.

Georges was glad that the Father said nothing of paying his respects to his parents. Something might have been said about his projected journey on Monday. It is true that, now, this would not have mattered, it would have caused no surprise. But he wanted to be alone that day. He would meet Alexander alone, as if in their conservatory.

At dinner, Father Lauzon was mentioned. His parents said they were sorry Georges had not asked him to stay to dinner. A little joke on the subject of St Alexis was made, but there was no more surprise that the Father's pupils should be so attached to him, since he was so attentive to *them*. This led to some reflections on the good points of religious boarding-schools, where the masters kept such a close watch on the boys' progress, endowing them with principles which would ensure their happiness in the life before them.

Father Lauzon had asked Georges to meet him after dinner and accompany him to the station. The Dean, with whom he was dining, was the priest who had preached at St Claude's on Whit Sunday, with such an uproar of loud roars and wild gestures. Everyone had smiled at his description of hell—the place from which one never, never, *never* returned.

The Dean's house was next to the Cathedral. Beside the door Georges read this inscription: "Night bell for sacraments." Well, he too was here for the sacraments.

The Dean congratulated him on his prominent appearance in the newspaper. Georges, rather than cause distress, was obliged to accept a small glass of liqueur.

"It's a good training for youth, and helps one to be a good Christian," the Dean assured him. He was a merry priest. But Father Lauzon had the tact to hasten matters. He said, "My

young pupil and myself would very much like to withdraw for a few minutes, to visit your church.”

A concealed door opened into the vast, dark nave. The Dean switched on an electric light above the door and then knelt where he was, in the glare. Father Lauzon, followed by Georges, went on into the body of the church, which remained in semi-darkness.

They made the sign of the cross and the Father began the psalm for the dead. Georges thought he had forgotten the words but they came back to him as he sang. He remembered the *De profundis* which figured in the office for Septuagesima, on the day when, for the first time, he won a glance from Alexander in the college chapel. And now, deprived of such glances for ever, he was in a cathedral—paying one of those pious visits recommended in the Rule for the holidays. This led him to think of a similar visit, in which he had been indirectly involved: the one which, during the Easter holidays, Father Lauzon had paid to a church in S. accompanied by Alexander, who was misleading him. This evening’s prayer was the conclusion to those other prayers.

The priest recited the orison which follows the psalm: “*Absolve, quaesumus, Domine, animam famuli tui, Alexandri . . .*”

Georges was disturbed at hearing the name he substituted for that of Juventius, in a very different context, uttered in Latin in a context of this kind. They were as remote from Catullus, here, as from the *Bien-Aimé*. And he was moved by the shadows and the solitude. He thought of the days when he was coming to this church to prepare for his first communion, when he was no less innocent than Alexander at the time Father Lauzon had spoken of. The faith of his childhood confronted him. After believing in signs and portents,

he was going higher.

The priest was praying alone and in silence, but Georges suddenly had the feeling that he was taking part more nearly now than when he was perfunctorily repeating the words himself. For the Father's silent prayer was finding an echo in Georges' heart, and the whole tragedy was taking on a new aspect for him.

He began to see the origin of what had happened elsewhere than in the manoeuvres of men or the plans of fate. He remembered what he had been taught concerning immanent justice in Religious Instruction lessons. Alexander and he had been punished for their sins. They had not committed the sins of which he had falsely accused himself for his own ends, the sins of which Father Lauzon knew Alexander to be guiltless; but they had committed others. They had profaned the sacraments, holy places, and the liturgy. The God they had ignored had taken His revenge on them. Had Georges ever really taken the protection of the ancient gods seriously? If so it was his turn to say, "Thou hast vanquished, O pale Galilean!" Alexander's tragedy, then, became a Christian one, like *Polyeucte*, or like Father de Trennes'. And, like the latter's intimate conversation, like the play, too, which had been so loudly applauded by the parish clergy, the tragedy would be concluding with the word "God". Father Lauzon looked like having this last word.

Georges refused to admit this. As he had done in the past, so, now, he put these ideas from him. Inconceivable that Alexander had had to appear before the tribunal of SS Tarsicius and Pancras. The Heaven of the Virtuous Decalogue and of Nicholas Cornet was not his. Death had not restored him to God, but had sent him to a different heaven, the heaven for those whose radiant youth had caused them to be removed from the earth to be made

gods. Hyacinthus and Daphnis had a new companion. It was in honour of his budding splendour as an immortal that the little red lamp near the altar burnt steadily—the lamp of fire and flames, the lamp of that love which is as strong as death. Its colour would not, after all, have stood for blood; nor for sin; its first symbolism in Georges' eyes was its true one.

There were not many people in the streets. Music came faintly from some open window. At the corner of the bridge a group of urchins, lying on the parapet, were humming Lucien's song.

*Nous sommes les deux gosses  
Qui s'aimeront toujours.*

Their parents were calling them in. Georges recalled a song less suitable for the streets, that canticle of the Passion which Alexander had given him. In that, too, love was in question, a love which Alexander had not wanted to hear about.

Father Lauzon and Georges reached the station without exchanging two words: the last instants of their interview were evidently to be as silent as the first.

"Bear up," the Father said, pressing Georges' hand, "and write to me when your heart is sad. We shall have much to talk about, next year. It must be a holy year."

"Or perhaps," Georges replied, "we have, in your own words, said all we have to say to each other."

Now, returning home alone, he would have wished to follow Alexander. He would have

listened neither to advice nor to orders, but only to his friend, who spoke a language which neither Lucien nor Father de Trennes understood and which he himself had understood too late. But the boy had not taken everything away with him. Georges remained and he would realise a dream: his own life would be Alexander's, Georges de Sarre would become Alexander Motier in his soul. This alliance of their names was no longer a mere botanical play on the word hyacinth; like so many of the things they had said, it was to become a reality in the event.

A train whistled in the distance. Georges thought of his departure in January, when he was still unknown to the boy he was returning to, but already captivated and already anxious. He began to think of his departure on the coming Monday. The journey would be the last stage between past and future, and a last choice offered him between his many successive projects. There are people who kill themselves beside some other's grave. What course would Alexander's move Georges to? It would, at least, be a considerable subject for meditation. It might, if he wished, be his own monument. He dwelt upon the things which would have brought him there, him and the boy: the obstacles and illusions; excess of reason, and of unreason.

On the bridge he halted for a moment and looked at the river. This was the place, now deserted, where the boys had been singing that song a few minutes before. The banks of this same river had, one afternoon in June, shown him Alexander going down to bathe. Sun, clear water, and a flowery meadow had given way to shadows, foul water and the unpeopled quays. Yet the river drew Georges, fascinated him, told him that its embrace was also a good means to make an end, a means to hand, and classical. Georges suffered a kind of vertigo.

Perhaps the ideas which had possessed him that morning were regaining strength, embellished by the powers of might and darkness. He touched, as if it had been a talisman, the wallet which contained his dearest legacy—the notes which had been carried against his friend's heart, or written by his hand; the photograph, in which the eyes would open and smile and forgive; the Greek print which he had kissed. It was not possible that all this came to nothing. And it was Georges' task to prove it. The future, travelled by the light of the past, would be Alexander's vindication. Nevertheless, a propitiatory sacrifice was called for; he took off his ring and dropped it into the river. Lights danced upon the surface of the water, like the flames of the blazon which had consumed Alexander. But, like the Eleusinian boy, the flames had purified him, and left him to a destiny greater and more mysterious.

Resuming his way, Georges raised his eyes to contemplate the stars. There were as many as he had seen in the July 10th sky, from the dormitory window, but they promised a luminous morning. It was to the stars that Alexander had talked of him, and it was to them that Georges now addressed himself, speaking of Alexander:

“You are not the boy of prayers and tears, but of my love, my hopes, my certainty. You are not dead; you have only crossed over, for a while, to the far bank. You are not a god, you are the boy I am, you breathe in me, my blood is yours. What I have, you possess. As we hoped and wished, we shall henceforth be together for ever, and it is my turn to say to you, ‘How splendid that is: always!’”

He drew near to the house. He would be entering it with a hidden guest who would never leave him. A new life was beginning for them. Today's mourning belonged to the old one. Tomorrow was Georges' birthday, the first birthday of Georges and Alexander.

Tomorrow they would be fifteen.

*By the same author*

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